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J. K. FORBES

STUDENT AND SNIPER-SERGEANT

STUDENT AND SNIPER-SERGEANT

A MEMOIR OF

J. K. FORBES, M.A.

4TH BATTALION GORDON HIGHLANDERS

WHO DIED FOR HIS COUNTRY, 25 SEPTEMBER, 1915

BY

WILLIAM TAYLOR, M.A.

AND

PETER DIACK, M.A.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

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PREFACE

THE sympathetic co-operation of many friends of the late Sergeant John Keith Forbes, M.A., has made the compilation of this brief Memoir possible. It consists for the most part of the reminiscences of those who were privileged to know him at the different stages of his career, together with certain extracts from his own Letters and Diary. Most of the original pages of the Memoir were written in camp and rest-hut and dug-out, and many of them are stained with the mud of the trenches. It

is a matter of much regret that the latter part of Forbes's Active Service Diary was lost on 25 September, 1915, and was never recovered; but it is hoped that the absence of the brave Sergeant's piquant comments and reflections from the later chapters of this book has been in some measure counterbalanced by the narratives furnished by two of his sniper friends, one of whom has since made the Great Sacrifice. To a third friend, Lieut. F. W. Law, 4th Gordon Highlanders, so much is due that his name ought perhaps also to have appeared on the title page.

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I

HOME AND UNIVERSITY

I

HOME AND UNIVERSITY

JOHN KEITH FORBES was born in Aberdeen on 12 April, 1883, and it may not be amiss to say that he was exceedingly fortunate in his parents and his home. His grandmother on his mother's side was a woman of remarkable gifts, and her family was one of those whose distinction in scholarship has established a tradition in the North-East of Scotland. Even in those earlier days, when a higher education was more difficult to obtain than it is now, four of the brothers became distinguished graduates of Aberdeen University and afterwards achieved success in the Church and in Medicine, one of them being Arthur

Keith, the present Hunterian Professor, Royal College of Surgeons of England. On his father's side he entered into a similar heritage. His grandfather had been a man of severely studious habits, widely read in many branches of learning, and possessed of an almost encyclopædic knowledge of Shakespeare and the Bible. His father was one of the rising young schoolmasters in Aberdeen, and in the home the value of much reading and thinking was quietly advocated and exemplified from day to day.

At school, however, "J. K." (as he was almost always called by his friends in after years) was in most respects quite an ordinary healthy boy. He received the same course of instruction as thousands of others, and, like most of them, he seems to have passed through the various standards at school without betraying any signs of special brilliance.

He joined with the usual boyish delight in all games and pastimes, becoming in due course a very keen cricketer and "soccer"-player. He used to amaze his school-chums by his drastic method of learning to swim. Without a tremor he would throw himself from a height of twelve feet into seven feet of water and then wriggle to the bank somehow. It is interesting in this connexion to recall that, years afterwards, he could at any time and without special training equal the British record for under-water swimming. Very early, too, he acquired the habit of taking long walks in the country, sometimes in company, but generally alone. On one occasion he disappeared from home in the morning and did not return till dusk, when he naïvely announced that he had been to Hill o' Fare and back—a distance of thirty miles. And he was only nine at the time! At ten he made his first acquaintance

with the real mountains, during a holiday spent in the Cabrach district, and at fourteen he was the youngest of a party of four, the others being his father, a brother, and a friend, who went on a ten-days' tramping tour. From Aberdeen up Deeside to Ben Muichdhui, then across to Blair-Atholl, down the Tay to Dunkeld, and thence home—that was the trail. On account of his youth the older members detailed him to set the pace, and it is characteristic of the man we knew in later years that even then they had frequently to call him back. To those early experiences may be traced the source of that love of mountain and road which to the last was as a deep-flowing stream in his soul. As regards reading, he wandered far and often into the enchanted lands of adventure and romance. Never did Henty, Fenn, Stevenson, Dumas and Cooper find a more receptive or appreciative spirit.

He fed his eager boyish fancy upon the exploits of their heroes, and many an evening between bed-time and sleep he and his brother would give free rein to their imagination in the composition of wonderful tales of adventure all their own.

At the age of fourteen he was indentured as a pupil teacher, and, for the next four years, according to the system then in force, he spent half the day in practising the art of teaching, and the other half in study. At this stage he still maintained merely a good average, although more successful in the examinations in Scripture Knowledge held under the Donaldson Trust. In many ways, however, he already showed unusual concentration and tenacity. It was at this time, for example, that his interest in music was aroused. An old harmonium which had served for years as an occasional table was commandeered by him and after much

labour was restored to something like its original glory. Thus rewarded for his pains he toiled at Psalm and Hymn tunes from Tonic Sol-fa scores until he attained the uncommon power of playing Sol-fa harmony at sight. Being possessed of a good ear for music also, he was soon able to play from ear any tune with which he had made himself familiar. Such was the humble start of those musical studies which afterwards assumed so remarkable a place in his life. Very much in line with this was the way in which he acquired his knowledge of chess. The game was occasionally played at home, and he became interested. Without mentioning his purpose to anyone, he borrowed a manual on the subject from the Public Library and set himself to study it as only he could. After six weeks he challenged his father who was an experienced player, and in the first game laid him low. In those few

weeks he had mastered the principles of chess strategy. Later on, although he was always very keen on chess problems, he played only occasionally. He had other, and what he deemed better, things to do.

During his pupil teacher days he wandered much on the open road, and he was the moving spirit in many memorable tramps. He planned the tour, mapped the route, chose his companions, manufactured the tent, and led the expedition; and often when roads proved irksome he steered the party by compass and instinct across moors unknown and veiled in mist. Never admitting weariness, rain or shine, he was always the cheeriest one. A little incident of such a tramp reveals the nature of the man. Along with three companions he had reached a point under Ben Muichdhui where the Dee, a fairly deep stream even there, had to be crossed. Without a word

J. K. walked through, wet to the thighs; another of the party laboriously took off boots and stockings and crossed barefoot; the third jumped with the aid of a stone midway; while the fourth proved the instability of the stepping-stone by measuring his length in the river and scrambling ashore drenched to the skin. Scarcely waiting till the unfortunate member had emptied the water from his watch, J. K. made on to scale Cairn Toul. The main object of the day's tramp was not to be delayed by any obstacle.

At the end of his course as a pupil teacher we find him entering the United Free Church Training College for Teachers, with a high place in the entrance list. These were the days before the amalgamation of the various Training Colleges into undenominational Training Centres under Provincial Committees, and each Church trained its own students

separately. In the same year (1901) he became also a matriculated student of Aberdeen University.

Regarding his University days much has already appeared in the Press which will be found in the appreciations by others in this book. Suffice it here to say that, if notability could not be claimed for him on the ground of class distinctions, this was not because he lacked ability but simply because to him the routine of class-work was not life. He had little interest in prizes, and no ambition to beat other students for the mere sake of victory. He would study only such aspects of a subject as he thought worth while. Thus he followed his own line and made his own contribution to the student-life of his time.

Then, as afterwards, one of the most noticeable traits in his character was his unbounded enthusiasm, a quality which was most perfectly

restrained from fleeting effervescence by his admirable patience and diligence. So, though, as we have seen, there was nothing distinctively brilliant about his class record, yet, when he found a subject which gripped him, he applied himself to it with overmastering determination. He read widely and with great thoroughness, not confining himself to the narrow bounds of class lectures; but, although he worked probably as hard as most, none ever suspected him of that academic commercialism which is only too frequently the motive-power of a student's industry. Towards the end of his course he attended the Honours Classes in History and English Literature. By that time he seems to have found his bent, and in History especially he excelled. He meant to sit the Honours Examinations at the end of his fourth year, but an unfortunate accident made an end of his hopes in that direction.

While paring a holly stick he cut his finger; blood-poisoning followed, and an operation was found to be necessary. This interruption of his studies prevented him from finishing with Honours, and in 1905 he graduated with the ordinary M.A. Degree. That his failure to take Honours was a keen disappointment even to him there can be little doubt. Writing of the incident ten years after he says: "See how the hand of God wrought with me! That illness in the summer of 1905—strange that the cutting of a stick should have had such effect! The illness came and it turned the course of life. It re-arranged, as it were, the angles at which other things and other people smote upon my soul. Here, for instance was ——: without that illness he had stood for ever outside. With it he entered in and took possession; but if that holly plant had not beckoned he had never done it, and I

had been all along a student of the dry bones of history."

In the social and athletic side of University life J. K. took a large part. He was especially prominent on the football field. Football was one of his passions. He played sometimes at half-back, but his real place was in goal. There again he showed the same intensity of purpose. The goal was a citadel to be defended at all costs, and when it happened that his side was beaten, he would bitterly bemoan his own shortcomings although there was usually little enough justification for such self-reproach. He would speak as if he had failed in his duty and had unwittingly betrayed his fellows. In all his play he showed a splendid unselfishness ; it was no glory for himself that he sought, but only success for his team. As might be supposed, however, he never was a sound player as judged by the commonly ac-

cepted canons of goal-keeping. His methods were very effective and often brilliant, but characteristically unconventional. He was always a daring, erratic, meteoric goal-keeper. The team's "bruiser" in those days was an energetic "back" from the wilds of Banffshire, but even he admits that he used to stare with amazement at the reckless hardihood of his friend behind.

He was very clever too with his pencil, and was the recognized cartoonist among the undergraduates of his time. The back numbers of "Alma Mater" show many samples of his art. On leaving the University he seems to have let this artistic faculty lie dormant almost entirely until the need for field-sketching in the trenches, more than ten years later, called it forth again into new life.

His character in those days was that of a simple, lovable, high-minded soul, fearless in

upholding high ideals and good morals. Although none found greater zest in living than he, he neither smoked nor drank. Indeed he was an ardent advocate of total abstinence, and he had nothing but scorn for that devoted champion of bottle and flagon—the moderate drinker. Writing of the general impression made on him by Forbes in his University days, one who was in close touch with him says: "From what I knew of him then I quite expected him to be an intrepid leader of forlorn hopes—without fear, and, I imagine, to those who looked on, without reason." And another writes: "Forbes appeared to me then to be of a quiet, unobtrusive, naïve nature, showing little sign of the hidden talent. His youthful environment had made him what he was, truly religious, manfully honest, transparently sincere, fearlessly virtuous. It is rarely one meets with so many of the finer virtues in

any one person—I never have—and though his austerity of habit and thought might have entitled one to call him Puritan, yet he was none; for he never showed bigotry or intolerance."

II

TEACHER AND MUSICIAN

II

TEACHER AND MUSICIAN

AFTER graduation Forbes drifted into teaching, and the summer of 1905 found him beginning his work in Rathven Public School, near Buckie. And it was here, as things turned out, that his real development was to begin. In the case of the majority of men such an appointment would have been extremely unlikely to produce much change in the essentials of outlook and character. But with Forbes it was a step destined to revolutionize his aims and ambitions in life. He went to Rathven as any other young man fresh from college might have gone. He left it after seven years, with a marvellous record of progress in his own intellectual life and of devoted

service to the community. Already men who knew marked him as one who would undoubtedly leave the impress of a remarkable character on his day and generation.

It so happened that in that corner of the Moray Firth coast there were a few devoted music-lovers whose ambition it was in life to give themselves freely for the ideals of Music and Art in their own district. The greatest of these was undoubtedly Mr. Paterson, the headmaster of Rathven School, and it was to him that Forbes always attributed his great awakening. Mr. Paterson along with one or two others had slowly and laboriously built up the edifice of Music in Buckie. "Paterson," says Forbes, "gave his life for his Divinity, for the high gods of Music—and they are high gods. A fair house of it he built, rough work perhaps and hard, but promising fair." He it was who kindled in his young assistant

the fire of a new love, or should we not say rather that he fanned into flame an old fire which for some years had smouldered and burned low? For deep down in the soul of J. K. there had ever been the hidden fires of musical feeling and power which now burst forth with volcanic might and splendour at the touch of a master-hand. And with this renascence of music there came the secret of new life for Forbes. Henceforth Art was his Ideal of all that was worth being, doing or thinking, and the expression of "Art in Excelsis" was Music. Latterly he placed Music second to Christianity, but Art remained the high-way of approach to his conception of the Divine. The charm of Christ was partly due to the fact that He was the greatest of all artists.

Under the guidance of Mr. Paterson, then, he began the study of the violin. To J. K. a

particular study of any subject usually meant the exclusion of everything else while that study lasted. So it was with the violin. Other pursuits which had held no mean place in his affections were discarded. Every spare moment was devoted to the violin, and he has been known to spend six successive hours in practising one style of "bowing," at the end of which time he could exclaim with the ancient philosopher, "εὕρηκα, εὕρηκα". From the violin he passed to the viola and the 'cello. But by this time it was evident that his aim was not so much proficiency in tone and technique as a thorough mastery of the principles of musical instruments which would enable him to judge of their range and adaptability for orchestral work. Mr. Paterson being at this time Conductor of the Buckie Orchestra, Forbes had ample opportunity for obtaining first-hand knowledge, and he took

full advantage of his chances. Unfortunately Mr. Paterson died in 1906, and the friendship that had meant so much to Forbes came to an end. It was not merely that J. K. owed his introduction to Music to the older master. His debt was far greater than that as he acknowledges in his diary. Mr. Paterson had been a strong and earnest thinker and a thorough-going idealist. And the two friends, so divergent in type yet holding much in common, had many a long and serious discussion after the evening music-lesson. Although each probably represented a different point of view, yet what for both had been erected on the rock of truth could withstand every assault and be but the stronger for it. So it is not difficult to imagine that this friendly entrance into a philosophical and theological world, but little realized or understood before, must have been one of the very strongest

influences in broadening and illuminating Forbes' outlook upon life in general and his religious faith in particular.

However that may be, his musical development proceeded apace, his studies being continued with unabated fervour. Now he spent not only all his spare time, but all his spare money on instruments. Most people's recollections of his homely "digs" in Rathven are of a parlour strewn with fiddles, an organ, a piano, a 'cello, a viola, trumpet, bassoon, clarionet, and an innumerable multitude of books and scores. His unvarying plan was to buy an instrument first and then find out its properties from actual playing. As may be imagined the sounds that issued from his room were often weird in the extreme, but J. K. never faltered. One wonders what his neighbours thought! By the winter of 1908 he was ready to take up the Conductorship of the

Orchestral Society. (The position had meantime been occupied by Mr. Taylor of Keith.) He gathered around him the musical enthusiasts of the place, many of whom had been aroused by the inspiration of his own enthusiasm, and under his leadership they performed a noble work for Music. A Chamber Concert was held annually, at which they strove to reveal the beauties of the great Masters; and the musical public of Buckie owe to Forbes a deep debt of gratitude for the self-sacrifice with which he laboured to awaken in them a love for this, to him, the greatest of all Arts. His conductorship entailed a constant search for recruits whom he instructed in the various instruments. When he found a really promising pupil he scrupled not to present him or her with the necessary instrument—bought at his own expense. That was so like J. K.! In 1908 he was appointed Organist and Choir-

master in Buckie Parish Church. On the organ he was good and pleasant to listen to, but he excelled rather in the training of his choir than in his organ-playing.

His ambitions now soared to Composition. With this end in view he read hard in the theories of Music and Orchestration, and turned again with redoubled zeal to the works of the Masters, but for some reason or other his efforts in this direction never got very far, although those best fitted to judge are convinced that if he had pursued this course he could have gone a very long way indeed. He himself considered that other claims were prior. As he remarked to a friend one day, "it was rather selfish to be devoting time to composition—it could wait—while there was so much talent in the small place requiring to be cultivated". His actual compositions were: an Overture for full orchestra, which was

performed in Rathven; some orchestral accompaniments to choruses, also performed at Rathven; and a String Quartette, performed at one of the Buckie Orchestral Concerts. He was also writing a Cantata (both libretto and music). The libretto was finished, with some parts of the music, but the whole was never completed.

By this time (1910), too, he had come under the influence of another musical enthusiast, T. E. Wright, then Organist in Banff U.F. Church, and now one of the leaders of music in Aberdeen. Mr. Wright was Conductor of a recently formed Orchestral Society in Banff, of which J. K. promptly became a member, being enrolled as a 'cellist. His attendance at the weekly practices, held on Monday evenings, was most regular, although he had to cycle from Buckie to Banff and back the same night, a distance of twenty miles each

way, with his 'cello strapped on his back! The Banff String Quartette, of which he was 'cellist, carried off the premier award at the North-East of Scotland Musical Festival held in Aberdeen in 1911.

So during those seven years at Rathven he packed as much work into music alone, not to mention other pursuits, as would have been a lifetime's task to an ordinary man. For years he was never to be found without a musical classic in his pocket ready for reference whenever a spare minute offered. In that short space of time he mastered all the wind and string instruments. He had gone to Rathven with scarcely any knowledge of music; before he left he was a leader among men who had been followers of the art all their days. The early Masters and the leading modern Composers had been studied with the utmost thoroughness. He felt the glow of their in-

spiration and trembled at the majesty of their ideals. He followed their high call. From Music to Philosophy, from Philosophy to Theology, there lay the upward way to the City of God, wherein the feet of our friend walked. The words of Luther would have been as true on the lips of Forbes, "Next to Theology, it is to Music I give the first place and the greatest honour".

And what of his teaching meantime? Let it be said at the outset that he was never accustomed to regard himself as a success in his profession. That opinion, however, was largely the exaggerated form taken by his modesty. But it is true that he never seems to have set out to do very much as a teacher. Possibly the work had little attraction for him, and he had just drifted into it as many others are doing every year. In some branches of his work, however, he excelled. As might be

expected, the Singing Lesson was a delight to him and to his pupils. He threw all his energy into this part of the school-work, searching out old Scottish songs—hardly ever sung nowadays—and harmonizing them for himself. The songs he taught were in all probability taught in Rathven only—"Cauld Kail in Aiberdeen," "Tullochgorum," "Awa', Whigs, Awa'," and other North-Eastern folk-songs. Much to his regret, H.M. Inspectors of Schools never once during his time asked his class to sing a song. The Inspector in Scripture Knowledge, however, appreciated greatly his methods of instruction in that department. He was not content to feed his pupils on the husks of ecclesiastical scholasticism, for he taught them the religion of their fathers by teaching them to sing and understand the old Psalms and Psalm-tunes. "St. George's, Edinburgh," and Jackson's "Te

Deum" were not beyond J. K.'s little pupils, who even managed to sing the "Hallelujah Chorus" with credit, in a form adapted for children's voices. Another subject which he loved to teach was Drawing, and in this work too his labours were amply repaid by the progress of his pupils. He never sought to advance himself, however, in his profession. Music was the master-passion of his life, and he was quite content to regard teaching as being simply a means to an end. His profession gave him what he desired—a fair livelihood and a greater amount of leisure to search out the hidden things of Music and Philosophy than most other occupations would have afforded. Thus he remained where he was, contented in mind, seeking no promotion. In making known and understood of others the ideals that had set his own soul afire he had a great work to do, a work that was sacred to

him. Others there might have been to undertake it, but none was so free as he, since they would have had to make the work pay its way in the task of living. So he set himself to bear the pang of seeing inferior men rise over him, men whose soul was held by no distant gleam, and the pang of facing those whose hopes of him he had not fulfilled, who doubtless could not fathom the truth, and to whom he would not tell it. He himself says: "I had to choose—up or down. Up—along the pathway of spirit, rough and untrodden, the roughest that might be; or down—along the pathway of scholastic advancement, smooth and easy, wondrous smooth and easy if one's equipments were cultivated with the same earnestness and force as were the gods of Music, easy and smooth—yet that way the road to Hell, if ever a man went there." In the conflict between ideals and interests J. K. unhesitatingly chose

his ideals, be the consequences what they might. On leaving Rathven to enter the Theological College of the United Free Church in 1912, he was presented with a gold watch by the Orchestral Society, and in his reply to a highly complimentary speech on that occasion he made the same sort of reference to his experiences as a teacher: "Long before now I ought to have developed into a useful servant of the Scotch Education Department. That I have escaped that fate is due to certain unusual circumstances of my stay here, and perhaps none of those circumstances had so much influence as my connexion with the Orchestral Society. If I had listened to the counsels of those who advised me with the plainest common sense, I would have been out of this, five years ago, pursuing, with what energy I am capable of, the stereotyped path of educational advancement; and I have

a shrewd idea that, if I had tilled the fruitful field with but a tenth of the zeal with which I have ploughed the sands of High Art and Philosophy, I would have been at least in receipt of a salary somewhat more comprehensive than I have hitherto enjoyed. I deliberately, however, ignored this obvious common sense, and made up my mind that, as to whatever material advantages my profession could offer me, the game was not worth the candle, and that life could become far more interesting by my reaching after mental development along a higher line. Similarly, when music began to offer me material advantages with little expenditure of energy, I declined all offers of private teaching on the ground that my time was of greater value to myself than my work ever could be to anyone else. 'You make a great mistake,' I was told, 'not to make as much money as possible

while you are young.' 'While I am young,' said I, 'I much prefer to develop my mind.'" And again in the same speech, talking of the devoted labours of Mr. Paterson, he said: "People said of him as they say of me, 'He is mad—music-mad'. Mad we may be, but it is not music-madness. Music-madness does not impel a man to listen gratis to beginners stumbling through musical exercises out of time and out of tune. Music-madness, and indeed madness for any forms of the higher culture, is rare enough and precious enough; but this sort of madness which forces a man to strive to put what he has proved to be brightest and best in his own life into the lives of others, is rarer and more precious still." By that "madness" J. K. was pre-eminently possessed.

We must not, however, imagine that, with all this devotion to the serious and sublime

things of life, J. K. was ever a recluse. As a matter of fact, nobody seemed to have more leisure for recreation than he. While at Rathven he would play football with the best, put up a good game at cricket, take a hand at whist, play strenuous rounds of golf, and tramp six or eight miles of a morning before breakfast.

As in the early days, his chief delight was the road and the mountain, but now his rambles were always solitary. It may have been that the old companions had wandered to fresh fields and could no longer keep him company. Anyhow, he walked and climbed alone. The summer of 1904 had seen his first lone trail. With bicycle and bag he vanished to the West after a strenuous military camp at Barry. He was heard of in the lighthouse at Lismore, and then among the wilds of Argyll and Inverness. Here he no doubt got his

first glimpse of Skye. He saw its hills in the distance and marked them down for future exploration. From that time forward the Misty Isle became his favourite summer camping-ground. Towards the end of that first solitary tour, he left a clachan near Stromeferry about five o'clock one morning, pushed and carried his bicycle some miles till riding became possible, rode straight ahead till dark, slept an hour or two on the hill-side, passed Tomintoul at dawn, and breakfasted at Kincardine O'Neil on Deeside. He had done fully 140 miles—no small feat, considering the load he carried (tent, water-proof sheet, etc.), and the kind of road he had to cover. Another time he made a tour alone to the Cairngorms; and, though the details of it are mostly unknown, one incident remains. To save a *détour* which would have required more time than he could spare, he crossed the Dee—at that time

swollen with ice-water and lumps of melting snow—with his clothes bundled on his head! On yet another occasion he went to sleep quite peacefully in the guard's van of a goods train at Thurso, having asked the guard to rouse him at the point on the line nearest to Morven. He had seen that peak often from Buckie and must needs add it to his conquests. From Morven he saw "The Seven Sisters" and rugged Ben Hope far away to the west of Sutherlandshire. They, too, were noted down as the scene of a later expedition. But Skye, once visited, remained his dearest hunting-ground. He loved its rocks and crags beyond all others in Scotland. Here his equipments were the field-glass he used later in the trenches, a stout crooked oak staff, and a strong pair of hob-nailed boots. With these he used to venture alone where most climbers go roped, and many and daring were his ex-

periences. He had gone up a gully once, and, many hundreds of feet above nothing, came exhausted to an over-hanging cornice, where he had to remain for twenty minutes, half-sitting, half-hanging by his finger-tips, till he gathered strength and wind enough to twist himself over the last lift. He confessed that his thoughts during that interval were of the most serious kind, and, for the time, determined him to keep safer paths. But he had several narrow escapes of the same kind, though he said little about them. The loneliness and the danger of these mountain adventures had a charm which held him to the last, and much of his deepest thinking was done in the lone glens of Sutherland and Skye.

Talking of Skye reminds one of an incident he was fond of relating against himself which reveals a foible that probably struck some people as the most characteristic thing about

him, viz. his utter lack of care for his personal appearance. On the occasion to which we refer J. K. encountered a working man at Kyle of Lochalsh, while crossing in the ferry-boat if we mistake not; and having with him his powerful Goerz binocular, he offered his humble friend a look through. "My! but they are fine glasses!" exclaimed the man. "They would cost you a pound?" he added with tactful inquisitiveness. "Ay, twelve," said J. K. Whereupon the Celt guilelessly remarked: "And who would have thought that a plain, labouring man like yourself would have had twelve pounds to spend on a pair of glasses?" A little later the same man confessed that he had taken J. K. for a tramp first of all! Another time, some friends from Aberdeen had promised to come and spend a week-end with him in Buckie. In view of such an occasion his landlady laid strict

commands upon him to buy a new cap. This he did on the way to the station, but on returning to his lodgings he threw the cap into a drawer and locked it away. Next morning the old cap, with an inch or two of lining hanging down behind, went with him to church. He would turn up to conduct at a concert in his very plainest clothes, with his trousers turned up over a pair of heavy and generally muddy boots. He had always a curious disregard for many of those conventions that other people set great store by, and his carelessness in dress was part of this little idiosyncrasy. It was his way of witnessing to the truth that the things of the body are as nothing compared with the priceless treasures of the mind.

Such then was J. K. in his Rathven days. He found life a good thing, and entered with the sympathy of a comrade into the joys and

sorrows of those amongst whom he lived. He made many friends, from the crofter on the hill-side to the minister in the study. He was always willing to help, and at a social gathering of an evening he was an honoured and active guest, for his singing, playing and reciting made him wellnigh indispensable. On occasion we find him taking a hurried trip into Aberdeen, wiring a friend or two to come along with their instruments, and then appearing himself with a fresh purchase of music which they would run through till the "sma' 'oors" were left behind. Or, again, we find him in other guise consoling his landlady (for whom he had a great regard) in her illness by reading to her the Song of Solomon! Everywhere he went people felt the gentleness and sincerity of his character. Again he suggests a likeness to Martin Luther who has been thus described, "With deep brown-black

eyes, flashing and sparkling like a star, so that you could not easily bear their gaze . . . by nature a friendly and accessible man . . . his earnestness was so mingled with joy and kindliness that it was a pleasure to live with him". Some called him eccentric. So perhaps he was, a little; but it was the eccentricity of a great soul. He was known and loved of all in the community, and no truer or simpler tribute could have been paid to him than that of the lady who made the presentation from the choir of the Parish Church of Buckie when he was leaving to study for the ministry. "If you succeed," she said, "in making your first congregation love and respect you half as much as your first choir do, then we are sure your future will be bright indeed."

III

PEACE AND WAR

III

PEACE AND WAR

On 30 June, 1912, Forbes left Rathven to enter the Theological College of the United Free Church in Aberdeen.

The decision to take this step was perfectly natural for one of his character and ideals. He had always been a fearless upholder of the good life among his fellows, and in his own living he was at all times a most diligent follower of the highest. Life meant for him the being the best he had it in him to be. None but the loftiest of motives was ever allowed to hold sway with him. Furthermore, he had that indefinable pastoral instinct in his soul that would not let him rest careless of other

people's welfare and advancement, especially in the ideals of that life which is life indeed. He had a great compassion for those who were blind to these things, and a profound concern for those who preferred the perilous paths. The gifts he had—and they were many—had always been developed with the higher purpose in view of rendering benefit to others. Talking with gratitude of what he had been able to do in Buckie, for example, he said in public: "To how many is it given, after spending an evening in that atmosphere of peace and beauty and truth and purity in which alone Art can attain any perfection, to be compelled, not once but many times, by some inner law of their nature, to drag themselves forcibly out of that heaven of thought; to fling their minds into contemplation of what is most sordid in human nature; and verily to sweat blood that a fellow-creature may be

withheld from slipping back into those depths of bestiality whence human nature arises? These experiences . . . seem to be experiences to be avoided; but . . . they add to life while taking nothing from it." That statement was typical of his whole outlook. He was continually helpful, actively redemptive, recklessly unselfish. Then, too, the quiet life of thought at Rathven and the frequent pilgrimages to the solitude of the everlasting hills must have had a profound influence in shaping his final choice of career. These were times when he learned more and more to see all things "in the light of eternity". There are some indications also, that, towards the end of his stay in Rathven, Music did not satisfy him. At one time he entertained the thought of making it a career, but he gradually abandoned that project as he became increasingly absorbed in Philosophy and The-

ology. Another contributory cause may be found in the fact that for a considerable time before making up his mind to leave the Teaching Profession he had not been quite at home in that work. He felt that the trammels of the Educational System under which he had to carry on his daily duties made it impossible for him to mould the minds of his pupils so as to secure their highest good. As an alternative he considered that by entering the Church he would have better opportunities of influencing the youth and children of our land, whom he naturally looked upon as the hope of both Church and State. "In my time," he says, "I have put my hand to a score of things, any one of them steeped sufficiently in the Spirit of the Infinite to make a life-time seem short; but surely it is true that, having thus laid my foundations broad, I should be turning my energies upon

a single, solid edifice." And so he turned to the work of the ministry.

In the Theological College, as everywhere else, his work was performed with amazing devotion and energy and with almost unparalleled success. He entered with an easy lead over the three Colleges (Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Aberdeen) in the Entrance Examinations, a lead which he maintained throughout. The colleges of the United Free Church are well known for their high level of scholarship, but J. K. stood head and shoulders above anyone of his time. He had never studied Greek until the summer he left Rathven, and yet a few months' study was sufficient to give him a special prize. Again, he left College at Easter with the intention of starting the study of German, and he came back in October reading Goethe and Eucken in the original with ease. In all his class-work, and

especially in Hebrew, he was a marvel to even the most gifted of his contemporaries. It is an abiding inspiration to have been in the same class as J. K. And he was most unselfish in his work. Any and every difficulty, scholastic or otherwise, was referred to him, and none was more willing to spend infinite time and energy in helping his fellow-students. Nor were his interests all in his books; none did more to keep up the social life and the *esprit de corps* of the College. It may be said of him with truth that he lived and worked not for himself, but for the other men, for the good name of the College, and above all for the Kingdom of God. Many a time when the finances of the Missionary Association were low, he would preach even in his busiest seasons, accepting no fee for himself, that the money might go to the work in the Mission District instead. He was equally prodigal of his time,

despite his amazing diligence. He would frequently travel back to Banffshire to help some old friend with a concert or a rehearsal. And once a week at least he walked three or four miles out to Cove Bay (accompanied by his faithful terrier, "Bob") to help a fellow-student with his Mission Singing Class. He was always ready with advice and assistance for anyone who turned to him, and few there were who did not.

He was a fine example of the best type of Christian manhood. Everything he did was done as a sacred duty to himself and to the work for which he was fitting himself. No man ever set himself with more concentrated energy to prepare for the task of redeeming men; and no man ever followed with greater earnestness and humility in the footsteps of the Master. With vulgar ideas of success in the ministry he had nothing in common. His

place was ever to be in the forefront of the battle with evil. His generous heart ached for the poor, the suffering, the downtrodden, and the deluded. That he might fully equip himself to help these and to elevate the life of the community was his great ambition. For that he lived, and worked, and learned. One instance of his whole-hearted devotion may be given. Nature had endowed him with a very poor voice; but he immediately set himself in the sweat of his brow to improve it by constant practice in elocution, that he might be the better able to present the truth attractively and powerfully to men. We have recollections of many winter afternoons and summer mornings spent with him in one of the city churches, toiling and striving with the difficulties of "delivery". The training worked wonders; and we had little doubt that he was destined for great things as a preacher.

We recked not then of a nameless grave in Flanders.

When the colleges reassembled in the autumn of 1914, men's minds were full of perplexity. To all of us the war had come with a shock of indignant surprise. We were not accustomed to the idea of war. It upset completely one's ordinary valuation of things, and the peculiarly moral appeal of the circumstances under which our country entered into it made the task of deciding one's duty extremely difficult. The furnace of perplexity was heated seven times for those who were connected with the direct promulgation of Christian teaching. The whole situation constituted a serious challenge not only to their moral courage but to their faith. The first days of the new session, therefore, found every one in a maze of anxious uncertainty as to what he ought to do. Men hung around

the corridors and the smoking-room discussing their responsibilities and trying to help each other in forming a judgment upon them. J. K. was unusually quiet. He was thinking hard and preferred to keep silence until he had seen the issues clearly and come to a definite conclusion.

The way in which his decision was ultimately formed was somewhat extraordinary. One of the Professors, who no doubt appreciated the situation, set his class a paper to write one morning on "The Duty of Clergy and Divinity Students in the Present Situation". J. K.'s paper was an extremely interesting bit of work. After stating the views of the various parties in the Church, he proceeds to give his own discussion of the problem.

"There is," he says, "a very acute conflict of duties, arising out of a man's relations to his environment and to his God. In the first

place, he is a member of a State and, as such, has enjoyed a multitude of benefits, of which perhaps the greatest is that he is given opportunities to pursue his calling at his own good pleasure. The State may not be the bestower of benefits; but it is nevertheless only in accordance with its usages—only, that is to say, with its permission—that men, clergymen or otherwise, can possess life, and the joys of living, of thought, and of the spiritual life. But, furthermore, man has a wider relation, as the State has a wider relation, to mankind in general, and to mankind he owes greater debts than to the State which permits him. Clearly then, even with those two entities a conflict of duty must arise, and that to any man, be he cleric or not. But, after all, these relations are secondary and external, only affecting the man's essential nature by reaction. That inner nature has yet a more fundamental

relation to the Supreme Reality of all, to God Himself, a direct relation to Him, as soul to its Centre, in addition to the indirect relation to Him through the State and through Humanity. Now the difficulty comes through this complexity of relationships ; and the problem for every man is how to satisfy all. That problem may come home to the clergyman with peculiar insistence on account of his calling, not to say on account of his 'call'. That call under normal circumstances must include the best services, the best use he can put the whole man to, with all its talents, in the service of God, of mankind, and of the State. And under normal circumstances the question may be comparatively simple. But the present are abnormal circumstances, and not only so, but exceptionally abnormal circumstances. The call of the country may very conceivably coincide with the call of God, and

with the call of mankind, and that even for the man who has elected to devote everything to the service of Christ. The crucial points to be borne in mind are that the question relates to young, physically fit, and intellectually fit men ; and that, in the opinion of those best qualified to speak for the temporal needs of the country, the need at present is urgent. . . . There are only two alternatives. Either he (the clergyman or divinity student) must carry the Christian doctrine to the utmost and preach absolute non-resistance . . . or else he must take his country's estimate of his value and the urgency of her need alike, and share in the work proper to men of his age and abilities. It is a problem of consecration of faculty . . . and that in an abnormal time. Under the circumstances it may well be the more Christian thing to don the armour of the crusader rather than the cassock of the priest. . . . Personally,

when I look back on a certain turmoil of thought and feeling during the past weeks, I cannot help feeling that personal interest has bulked far too largely, and that under the circumstances the true sacrifice for Christ is the sacrifice for the country."

That was the last class exercise he ever wrote. He was not the man to state his convictions and not live up to them; and before another hour had passed he had enrolled at Woolmanhill as a private in the 4th Battalion Gordon Highlanders. Another of the students had already enlisted (Private John F. Knowles, killed in action, 5 May, 1915), and in due course more than half the College followed their lead.

Life in the Army meant more to J. K. than it does to most men. His devotion to the Gospel which he had chosen as his life-work to preach was singularly loyal and sincere.

He was—and was felt to be—a man who lived not for himself but for God. Thus he welcomed the opportunity of closer fellowship with men that he might know them, and, through knowing them, love and help them. He intentionally avoided joining a company of the battalion where he would be amongst men of his own class. He preferred to live and drill alongside men from the east-end of the city, from Shuttle Lane and East North Street, several of whom he knew already through his connexion with the Students' Mission in that district. The pressure of military life did not damp his enthusiasm for the Kingdom of God or rub the keen edge off his ideals. The desire to help and redeem remained with him all the way through. In this spirit we find him writing to the following effect: "The great problem is how to get Religion into the minds of these men. It is

certain that there is a way: certain that there must be a heart-hunger for God, asleep though it may be, in the soul of each. The problem is: how get hold of that, how awaken it, how stir it into vigorous practical activity? . . . What outlook on life have men of this type? Here is K—— now: a thorough bad one, drunken, thief, rowdy, possibly mentally somewhat deranged. How exactly does such a soul look out on life? Is there in him a soul at all—the soul of a true man and not of a brute beast? His hand is against every man and every man's hand against him. Is there any way of frontal attack on such men, any way of showing them their condition, anything either in Time or Eternity which will bring them to their senses, in a word, anything that will convert them certainly? Prayer must be in it: ceaseless prayer for a man, or for men, in whom one is interested, and so influencing

him through and through while he is unconscious of any power being put forth against him. . . . The Spirit must work upon them. Without such working, it is evidently hopeless."

When the Battalion was sent to Bedford, J. K. was transferred willy-nilly and greatly to his disappointment to the University Company. In his first letter from Bedford he says: "I have been put into 'U' Company. The Company is first-class, but I am anything but pleased. I saw the colour-sergeant this morning to try and get a transfer to another Company and a rougher crowd, more of the kind I was in in Aberdeen. The sergeant said he would speak about it, but it might not be easily arranged now. I suppose I should have kept it dark that I was a University man and then just gone where I was put. On Friday morning we were all taken to our

parade-ground, and all University men, clerks, and so forth were called out. I see now that I should not have gone out then. That is how I came to be put among the men of my own cast of mind again, and I am none too pleased. I hope it won't be long before I am back to the other sort of work again. Here it is just a holiday. Among those other men I felt I had some real work to do."

So far as one can judge he was not enamoured of the period of training. That can be easily understood. Life in the ranks is not a bed of roses, especially for a man of big vision and finely tempered mind. The training, too, is apt to seem artificial to one whose soul is athirst for the adventure of the real thing. In J. K.'s letters and diary we find frequent references to all the petty irritations that a common soldier is heir to—the absurd stress that is laid on button-cleaning and other seem-

ing inessentials, the abuse of authority, the terrible Philistinism of the whole system, the deadness and inadequacy of what spiritual ministrations there are. These things did not, however, blind him to the poetry and the greatness of the life. While they sometimes made the fires burn fiercely within him, they more frequently tickled his sense of humour.

The following is his description of a kit-inspection: "The kit-inspection is another of the marvels of military life. You spread out your blanket, a particular length and breadth it must be. Then you set your bed and remaining blanket, or blankets, folded in the approved style, at the head; and on the rest of your blanket on the floor you set your kit in array, all your belongings from helmet to boot-laces, from oil-bottle to hair-brush, laid out according to a prearranged pattern which may possibly be military, but, being capriciously

symmetrical, is in itself hideously ugly and therefore a positive sore to the soul. Then a sergeant looks round to see if everything is there : a lieutenant next looks in to see that the laces are not out of their proper place : next a captain has a squint to see that his subordinates have really been doing their duty : and if it is a field-day in the 'Interior Economy' line, you may even have the honour of standing to attention while a real live General displays amazement at privates possessing expensive safety-razors."

He was billeted with several other University graduates in an empty house in one of the suburban streets of Bedford, and this is how he pictures the military domicile : "Come hither, I pray you, into this room, here, on the evening of 9 January, 1915. Here am I, sitting on a bulky kit-bag, and that again on the top of a heap of folded bed and blanket.

At my hand Job and his friends, a commentary in German that provokes even a student of the Bible to profanity, my notebook, and a German dictionary. And these are waiting operations. They sit on a box which has once held canned milk; and by their side again is a tin of vilely-tinted paste we put on our harness, and a small brush for putting on the same; and I, in khaki, with buttons polished to shine as the sun, for if they shine as any lesser luminary of a surety I and that dread 'pelican'[1] must meet and I be devoured in his capacious and rapacious maw. Never was Job, surely, and the Eternal Mystery as shadowed forth therein, so strangely circumstanced!

"And the other things in the room: and the other men. Can we set them into that

[1] This refers to a common slang phrase in the army—"to get the pelican" = to get into trouble.

light, the mystic light of that Eternal Mystery? There is M. now. What does it all mean to him, lying back at ease there in a superannuated basket-chair reading a cheap edition of an ephemeral book? In front of the fire a tin box—S.'s kilt-apron drying thereon: at the other side of the fire from M. another tin box, the same wherein we keep a supply of coal and wood ready to hand, and thereon other articles set out to dry. For the rest—the most prominent feature is boots, three or four pairs in every corner.

"And the one gas light in the centre—then the roof, and through the roof the clear January air, and the evening star in the west, and far, far beyond, the stars and the unfathomable depths of Heaven and Hell. Bah! What does the human soul have to do with such things?

"There is S. now, through in the stone-

floored kitchen scrubbing his equipment—that invention of a military fiend—with as hot water as hands can stand, and ammonia or petrol mingled therein. And why? Because, forsooth, he is enamoured of the spotless cleanliness of a khaki-daubed man-harness. And the others—L. with his dry humour, generous; and F. solid and careful—the whole five, and the surroundings and the diversity of thoughts, and in each that inscrutable, all-important mystery—ah, God, reveal it to me more clearly than I have seen it heretofore: give me the power to see, and the power to proclaim to others what I see that I may lift many to see with me."

Another typical evening—that of 8 January—he tells us was spent on Job,[1] letter-writing, and washing a grease-spot from his kilt-apron.

[1] A copy of the Book of Job in Hebrew was Forbes's constant companion in camp.

"Really," he says, "it is extraordinary how the fear of the 'pelican' makes a spot of tar in the fore-front of one's kilt-apron react upon the whole soul of the whole man. Our captain is a warrior to inspect. His soul glows with delight when he can pounce upon some unhappy offender who has failed to shave or whose buttons shine not as the sun. So a black spot in the centre of an expanse of otherwise stainless khaki may well prove your undoing. You stand at attention in the rank as the captain moves up and down, and ever and anon the colour-sergeant is instructed to take some unfortunate's name for punishment. You stand there, and you feel that black spot growing, growing in size and in blackness, until it seems to spread and blacken the whole apron as a very stain of sin on the soul of the vilest sinner that ever moved. Then the relief, as the order to march off is given and

respite is assured—for a little while at any rate, because the captain may still be unsatisfied with the prey he has got and be on the outlook for any little sin overlooked. Then the supreme relief when 'Dismiss' comes and you are home, the apron off, and the spot back to its proper perspective. Tea-time—the spot has vanished into the black depths of Sheol. Pay Parade on Fridays—what do grease spots in blank expanses of khaki matter then? They are things of time: but Pay, especially at the rate of a shilling a day, is a matter of eternity. But you come back home again, with those seven earnests of patriotism jostling one another out of your pocket. There hangs the apron on the wall, and over its very heart —the greasy tar-spot. And your heart collapses. The things of time are with you again. . . . So you get out the Company's store of petrol, and ammonia, and soap, and

soda; and you put the kettle on the fire, the fire that burns of coals supplied by a grateful country through an ungracious quarter-master. So you sit, watching a fire that won't blaze up, whistling to a kettle that won't boil. Thus you wait—and I study Job, and out-do Job in patience. If the Satan had only known to tempt Job to enter the British Army and then to face him up with a tar-spot on a stainless apron, he would have prevailed. At last the kettle is a-boiling, and then a long, weary wrestle with the spot until patience, even such as may be drawn from Job, has failed—and you desist with a half-victory: the utter blackness of the spot has given way to a horrid grey smudge. You hang the thing up at 'Lights Out' and go to bed hoping for the day. At least your conscience is clear: if the captain condemns you, you are a martyr, not a sinner. You awake in the morning hardly daring to

look at the enemy. When at last you screw your courage to the sticking place, there is a ragged *white* blotch, spreading over half the front of the apron, and a small grey blotch in the middle of that; for the ammonia, the petrol, the soap, and the soda, and the slow-boiled water have done their work only too well. Would that the khaki dye put into the cotton by the hand of man were as fast as that put into the tar by the hand of Nature!"

For a time he was evidently much exercised over the question of whether he should apply for a commission or not. His summary of the case is interesting. "Here I am not among common working men, but men intellectually of my own class and exposed to exactly similar temptations. Then the case lies thus: Either I must go from them to the company of the common man, or go hence to command the

common man if I cannot get alongside him. Then if we go to the trenches I shall be beside him. . . . It is a question of serving God and the King, or God through service of the King and Country. Can I then serve Him best as private or as officer? At present, as private, such opportunity of service is reduced to a minimum by the special circumstances. As an officer I might be able to affect men favourably. There can, then, be only two ways of it: Either to find my way as a private to the lower classes which in this battalion are fairly well weeded out, or to get to the command of such, and influence them for good if possible."

It was almost impossible, however, in those early days of the war to get released for a commission, and, as it turned out, the battalion went abroad on active service before anything definite had been done. But there can be no doubt that Forbes found far greater scope for

his powers afterwards as an N.C.O. than he ever could have done as an officer.

Perhaps the most interesting thing of all in his papers is his continual musing on men and life as he tramped along in the khaki lines or went about his daily, commonplace duties as a soldier.

"It is all so strange," he exclaims, "so mysterious, this whirligig of humanity in the midst of the mighty Maelstrom of Creation. See those thousands ahead, and thousands behind—strange to realize that in each one of them there meet the Eternities of Time and Space and of the possibility of Perfection. . . . Strange, too, yonder aged man with the infant at his hand—the same eternities live in him, more or less known to him as such. What does the passing pageant of Highlandmen mean to them? And he again, he with the black band round his arm: the affairs of death and

birth wait not for wars, even for mighty wars such as this. Here now is one John Smith, say, private in the 4th Gordon Highlanders, holding in his being the secrets of eternity, possessed somehow of that power to attempt to advance into the Eternity of Perfection—else were he not here. What does *he* mean? that strange spirit of his, which uses brain and body somehow as a means to an end which God alone knows. Thousands such as he, inscrutable mysteries in the vast whirlpool!"

And again, looking back on life, he says: "These past ten years, a strange story: almost ten years since I left the University well equipped for the battle of life, nay rather, say the battle of living; for the battle of living in this world and the battle of life, the battle of the soul for life, are often terribly different things. But the hand of God has been upon me all along to equip me for the battle of living,

and yet to twist the soul strangely so that in the battle of life that of living disappears and is matter for jest—as doubtless it ought to be. . . . Ten years ago, equipped no man better—and to-day, still attempting to equip myself, doubting, dreading when we again join battle, I and the Task of Living."

Of the future he says comparatively little. It is so uncertain. Yet no man went forward into it with greater confidence or more ready to "greet the unseen with a cheer". "This," he writes, "is the crack company of a battalion of a famous regiment. Some of these days a particularly hot piece of work to be done, and then—half the company wiped out. Is there then a mysterious Providence watching over all? casting scales over the eyes of the enemy to shield those for whom it has work to do? Can there be so, or some such? And am I one of such? Why should I be?

My life in the past has not been outwardly different from other men except that it has been perhaps more of an outward failure—ay, and an inward failure too, I fear, if the naked truth were told. . . . Anyhow, life is but the opening of the mystery, death carries it on."

Towards the end of January, he was one of a party of fourteen sent to the neighbourhood of St. Ives to picket some roads over which some enemy spies were supposed to be travelling. He refers to St. Ives as a beautiful little place, and he seems to have enjoyed his night experiences on guard there immensely. Some of the finest things in his diary were written then.

"Night," he writes in one part, "and all the trouble withered away from earth. Browning is a good friend in the silent hours. Here have I been for hours trying to bring half-forgotten lines to memory, not without success

—and lo! I find that, a hundred yards away, across the fields up and down by that feeble glimmer of light, is a comrade similarly recalling to memory half-forgotten lines of the 'Odyssey'. And that again is a strange part of the vast mystery—all these converging lines of thought, and emotion, and action, and impulse, outside and inside, meeting in the infinite, eternal spot of Man's Personality.

"A picture to be remembered, to haunt one in the afterwards—the rushing hum of the swift staff-car, the rapid pull-up as the red light warns, the bright gleam of the headlights and the figures of the waiting men and the heaped-up carts of the barricade—all leaping into visibility, a strange grey colour in the bright gleam of the electric light—and the background of trees and distant houses—and the moon over all, symbol of the Eternal that changes not. 'Who is like thee in heaven, light of the

silent night? The stars are ashamed in thy presence: they turn away their sparkling eyes. Whither dost thou retire from thy course when the brightness of thy countenance goes? Hast thou thy hall, like Ossian? Dwellest thou in the shadow of grief? Have thy sisters fallen from heaven? Are they who rejoiced with thee at night no more? Yea, they have fallen, fair light, and thou dost often retire to mourn. But thou thyself shalt fall one night, and leave thy blue path in heaven. The stars will then lift their heads: they who were ashamed in thy presence will rejoice. Thou art now clothed with thy brightness. Look from thy gates in the sky. Burst the cloud, O wind, that the daughter of Night may look forth, that the shaggy mountains may brighten, and the ocean roll its white waves in light.' So Ossian. No better companion for the silent night than one of the master-souls!"

IV

SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE

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SHORTLY after their return from St. Ives the battalion was ordered abroad on active service. On 19 February, 1915, they left Bedford, glad to be quit of the long and irksome months of training and eager for the thrill of actual warfare in France.

Describing the Channel-crossing, Forbes says: "We have a few hours to wait at Southampton till all is ready: then aboard and tea served out. Evening and departure — a beautiful scene: the city lights dropping astern, the new moon sinking in the south-west, and the stars coming out more and more, and through it all the ship and we aboard dropping southward silently, for cheering is forbidden:

on the shores of Hampshire lights of towns and villages: ever and anon a searchlight, busy, goes past to port. . . . Yonder is our escort, a French destroyer, an anxious watch before her assuredly, for is not this the 19th, and just yesterday the modern Berlin Decree came into force, and every British ship must go to the bottom with all hands at sight of a German submarine. . . . After a while I go below grudgingly to a scene of another kind. A large compartment in the fore-part of the ship; one or two improvised rifle-racks; half a dozen bad electric bulbs which throw out a dull yellow-red light, or rather half-light; a score or two of life-belts; and two or three hundred men, with two or three hundred rifles and the same number of equipments. The aft part of the compartment has a few rough benches and forms fitted up. Here are the sergeants' quarters! How are the mighty

fallen! Ay, and at tea-time they have no more a separate mess: they fall in with the vast, nameless numbers and take the cook-house wash in mess-tins as does the rawest and roughest private."

They landed at Havre next morning and were encamped at Bléville, just outside the city. One incident of their stay there is worth relating. Two college friends of J. K. had been in France all winter working for the Y.M.C.A. and were returning to England about that time. The stoppage of the ordinary Channel boat-service owing to the submarine blockade had caused them some difficulty and delay, and after visiting one or two ports in a vain endeavour to get out of France they finally betook themselves to Havre. There they were met by the Rev. Lachlan MacLean Watt of Edinburgh, who told them with great delight that he had actually met a Gordon that

day carrying a copy of the Old Testament in Hebrew in his tunic pocket. The two friends looked at one another and smiled. "J. K." was the name on both their tongues. Of course it must be he. There could be only one man in the British Army with a Hebrew Bible in his pocket—J. K. and his beloved Job must be in Havre! The 4th Gordons must be across! Hasty inquiries were made, and the battalion was located at Bléville. Thither the two followed with all speed, and arrived just in time to find J. K. and many other comrades of their University days settling down to their first night in France. The Hebrew Text of Job was there all right, carefully accommodated in a specially constructed pocket. J. K. was very quiet that night. His mind was again wrestling with the great problem of the book: "Why is light given to a man whose way is hid?" Surely

a strange but not unfitting prelude to the trenches.

They left Havre on the morning of the 22nd and travelled from the Gare Maritime to the rail-head in the ordinary troop-train, which consists of a long string of trucks, each marked "Men—40; Horses—8". On such a journey there is nothing to do but read, sleep, or look out, none of them easy or pleasant. If you would look out you must stand; if you would read you must sit on your pack; if you would sleep you must twist yourself into the most impossible positions. That is how the day is spent; and this is J. K.'s description of the night. "Then comes the night, the longest night I ever seemed to know—dozing, attempted dozing, resolute graspings after sleep that comes not. . . . Thirty-three men in that narrow space seeking sleep—windows and doors all closed. No, it is not cold, despite

the chinks in the floor through which the wheels roll louder than we usually hear them. Weird the scene. A smoky lamp hung by a chain, which by midnight is flickering to a premature decease, overlooking the thirty-three lying in all postures, some fortunate enough to get stretched straight out, others at all angles imaginable and unimaginable; some over their fellows, some under; this with head pillowed on a comrade's feet, that with military boots perilously near another's face. And here am I, in a corner, my back against a row of rifles, squeezed into two square feet of space, seeking sleep even with equipment angles pressing into me. Do I want ease from that posture? I stretch out my legs over the next man, and wriggle a little. When that must be eased, the first posture is impossible. Those around have closed in, and you must sit or stand or use your weight to some effect.

And all this while the train is rattling into the night."

By morning they were coming near Belgian soil, and in due course rail-head (Bailleul) was reached. The 4th took up their quarters in an immense vinery, with acre upon acre of covered glass and thousands upon thousands of vine plants. "Here we are within sound of the guns," he writes, "and what a day of rain and sleet. And the guns roaring ever more savagely. God help the poor beggars who are nearer them! Here we are in a Hell of mud and cold; there, to that is added fire and iron and the demon of man's passions. Think of what is going on away there under the damp mist canopy, the devil's work, the dying men and horses, the suffering, the wounded, the dead. . . . Our turn is hastening hitherward. God strengthen us to meet it, when it does come, like true men!" If the day was un-

pleasant, so too was the night. "Our first night in Bailleul, among the vines under the glass, looking up through it into the deep blue of the sky, with its sprinkled stars, and moon half-way to the full. A glass-house is not the most comfortable of sleeping-places—rather the jolty carriage, if one would but have room to stretch, but you want to curl up into the smallest bulk possible and get your nose out of sight, as does your cat or your dog. Fresh air is all very well under certain conditions. The morning draws on, and with it the stiff frost. I lie and think and try to pray. Away out there, but a few miles off, are fine men in the trenches. We lie here in our sheepskin coats, among blankets and waterproof sheets, under heavy overcoats and heads deep in woollen helmets, and all dry as tinder about us and beneath us. Yet we are cold, and move in towards one another for warmth and

get a little. . . . Ah, God! What then of those grim-faced ones keeping watch in the trenches? We lie here, rifle to hand, full marching order, ready like the Israelites in Egypt to move out at a moment's notice. For at any moment the enemy may force that grim-faced barrier, and their shells be falling, if not here, then somewhere near us who have offered our lives where they might be needed. So passes the night, sleeping and waking and shivering, thinking and listening and praying—strange sounds when a thousand men lie asleep under long glass-houses—strange echoes in these places, and the mingled snoring and regular breathing and occasional cursing—a weird chorus in the night air. So to the early morning and slow awaking of the host to the cold frost-laden dawn, for we have had time enough to sleep.

"To the wash then—water frozen in the

pipes—there a great pool, poisonous-looking its contents—that we must take or go without wash or shave: too foul that water to freeze evidently, not too much so for soldiers to wash and shave. Ay, but it is cold, so cold indeed that fingers hardly know to hold the razor. Yet we must wash and shave, and prepare feet to pass the most stringent foot-inspection, and dry them, all on one towel, for a common pack will hardly hold more than one and a dish-towel—another marvel of military life."

During the few uneventful days at Bailleul we get occasional glimpses of J. K.'s thoughts as he moves here and there, on duty and off. Now he is in the town, "an old-world place, with mud everywhere save in the causewayed streets". He notes how few able-bodied men are left, and regards with sympathy the sad-eyed women and half-starved children. "The red track of war has been here also: German

soldiers have slept under these very roofs, and many lie buried round the vineries." Now it is his turn to be mess-orderly, a fatigue rendered more unpleasant than usual by the peculiar circumstances of the place. His recipe for dinner needs no comment: "Truly dinner is a marvellous operation, and cooking the highest and finest of the arts. Take one camp-kettle, fill half-full with scraps of bully-beef, fill up with equal quantity of ship's biscuits, and then add some water, put on fire to heat till dinner-time, then serve out anyhow, with sauce of sooty grease and condiment of cursing, in the midst of a pushing crowd of famished privates." Then when the meal is over "comes the orderlies' aftermath, the dixies to clean. Away with them to the dung-heap, then to the street outside the gate, through the mud and over the uneven cobble-stones, where motor-wagons jolt dizzily and dispatch-

riders side-step twenty times in the minute and yet keep a miraculous balance. So to the pumps, where a strange scene presents itself—two score of orderlies and threescore dixies cluster around there. 'Deil tak' the hin'most' is the motto—a swaying crowd pressing towards the central pump, a very whirlpool of humanity surging round the point of eddy. He at the heart with the self-satisfied grin on his countenance stands waiting for the slowly filling bucket, and so on till the last survivor limps wearily cookhousewards, late for whatever parade may be, doomed to endure whatever fatigues may be on the go."

On 27 February the battalion left Bailleul, and after a two miles' march crossed the frontier into Belgium. The rattle of musketry was now distinctly heard, and the Red Cross wagons with their sad burdens brought home to all the dread realities of war. Yet somehow

there arose in J. K. a feeling of more confidence, a feeling that he would come through "all this matter of gloom and hatred and horror and blood, untouched". "It may be," he says, "an illusion. Many have had it in days gone by, and to-day, and yet have perished, their hope fallen to naught; yet there it remains." A further march of three miles from the frontier brought them to La Clytte, a town of huts set down in a wilderness of clay which the multitudes of men had converted into an unspeakable horror of sticky mud. The huts numbered some three score, low wooden erections, with corrugated iron roofs, painted earth colour to deceive aircraft, the floor sunk a foot, and banked all round with clods of earth. Each hut was about twenty feet long, fourteen broad, and seven high in the centre, and was destitute of windows and chimney. There were two dozen men in each,

so that the space per man was somewhat cramped, but not so much so as in the railway truck from Havre to Bailleul.

The first evening there J. K. was detailed for guard. He had first duty at No. 2 post—an ancient, broken-down carriage set in a sea of mud and surrounded by transport carts, sunk almost to the axles in mud. It was a miserable job splashing about in this quagmire, and he was not sorry when his first spell was over and he could return to the guard-room for four hours' rest. The guard-room at the time happened to be the home of the cooks, who seem to have kept things lively even in that desolate spot. "Army cooks," he says, "are a human species by themselves, not only when sober, but more especially when drunk, as most of them are in the guard-room to-night. Here the scene then; cooks lying crowded, the sleeping ones snoring marvellously, the

waking ones swearing even more marvellously; in one corner a guttering candle, by whose light a solitary figure is writing a letter. Towards the door are men of the guard fully armed and equipped, ready for a move at a moment's notice, their feet outstretched to a glowing brazier improvised from an empty biscuit-tin; enter various cooks at various intervals, in various stages of intoxication, who stumble over legs, dodge the brazier and the guttering candle, and fall cursing and swearing into some sort of rest." Early morning brought "guard" again, "the coldest, the wettest, and the slowest period to pass". Then the sun rose, the camp awakened, and already people were on the way to early morning worship; for it was Sunday.

That day J. K. got his first view of German shell-fire, as several shells could be seen bursting in a wood a mile or two away. Every-

where were marks of devastation. "Look at the country-side," he writes, "here the huts and the trampled fields that should have been bearing rich crops, and will assuredly bear crops richer still next year, if the rotting bodies do not find enemies worse than the Germans. Yet what a horror is it to us a country-side so! And Belgium, poor stricken country, what of it is not in German hands, is full of troops, and many of its fairest fields used for entrenching and parade grounds, and trampled into clayey mud." After such sights hard manual labour was a blessing. Drains had to be dug and roads laid—"men's work again, a vast relief after months of housemaids' and shop-decorators' work". Of course there were "grousers," but J. K. had no sympathy for them. "What fools we mortals be," he says, "we quarrel and fight, we privates, over missing pots of jam and missing loaves of bread, and 'grouse' and

grumble over work and officers and rations. Which is the greater fool, he who quarrels over the loaf that has gone amissing, or he who is the prime cause of its going amissing? For there is usually ample for all, except the gluttons, and they can never get enough under any circumstances."

There was great excitement in camp one of the nights at La Clytte when men were called upon for special work. Much to their disgust most of the 15th Platoon, to which J. K. belonged, were chosen for the fatigue. However, in the midst of the hubbub, a fresh order came to change huts. Odds and ends were hastily collected and packed, then off to the "Fall-in," leaving half of the kit to be removed by other fatigue men. Speculations as to the object of the evening's parade were rife, but none came up to the reality. The men marched out without equipment, carrying thirty

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rounds in their pockets, and rifles loaded and slung. J. K. marched with a Lewis-man, and passed the time very pleasantly in conversation about Skye and other islands of the West, his favourite haunts in former excursions. The sounds of musketry grew nearer and sharper, and soon the party left the main road, and began trudging along a side road several inches deep in mud. The route lay across sodden fields and past ruined farm-steadings, and walking became increasingly difficult and dangerous owing to the treacherous shell-holes which everywhere pitted the ground. They advanced in single file, carefully and cautiously, and as they neared their destination the bullets sounded uncomfortably close at hand. At the first "ping" just overhead there was not a man who did not duck his head. J. K. confessed to doing so, but after that first "baptism" a kind of fatalism took

possession of him and made him realize the folly of attempting to dodge the bullets. At last they were halted behind a gentle rise beyond which were the German trenches some four hundred yards distant. Their night's work was to dig a reserve trench. The Engineers attached to the party soon marked out the lines, and for two solid hours under the whistling bullets the men toiled at their job. No task-master was needed, for it was abundantly clear that the further they got underground the safer they would be. The rising of the moon gave the signal to cease work, and the party began its tiresome tramp back to the huts. The general feeling was one of disappointment. The thrill of going under fire for the first time did not come up to expectations, for after the first death-messenger had flown overhead there was little apparent excitement or "nerves". J. K.'s own feeling was one of

"distinct joyousness, an ebullition of the joy of life, the blood of generations of fighting men stirred up within".

The last day in the huts was quiet, there being little to do but read or write. In the evening J. K. held his nightly converse with Job. "Strange variations in the scene," he writes. "Behold a piper hard at practice, Job and I in close communion, and away in the distance the bullets are flying and the star-shells lighting them to their billets. Out there men are being slain. O God! and away out there men are acting with intent to slay. But yesternight, I myself was so acting that men might slay without being slain. And to-night, this inferno of sound let loose under this low roof; it is a marvel, under the stars and the rising moon."

V

IN THE TRENCHES

V

IN THE TRENCHES

On the evening of 9 March "D" Company, with which the University Company was incorporated, went into the trenches east of Kemmel, a village a few miles south of Ypres, in order, as J. K. puts it, "to learn somewhat of the wrinkles of this extraordinary life". These trenches the battalion held, relieving itself periodically by companies, up to the end of April, and from the start the horrors of that strange life descended upon them. The first two days were spent in the so-called "Reserve Barns," partially ruined farm-steadings used as quarters for the reserve companies. Reading and cooking, with times of fitful slumber, filled up the hours of this enforced

and necessary captivity, but there was little peace for any of them. The enemy were continually searching for one of the British batteries concealed to the rear of the barn. Then suddenly a shrapnel-shell dropped just short of the barn, perhaps five or six yards from the door. Instantly the place was full of tragedy—two men killed and several wounded. "Yet," writes J. K., "we sit here, laughing and talking, eating and sleeping, as if nothing had happened yesterday. It's all in the day's work, and our time may come any moment: it's what we are paid for; it's what we have sworn to do."

From the barns journeys had to be made to the firing-line at night with brushwood, sand-bags, and rations for the company in the trenches. The way thither lay through a village, "a scene of indescribable ghastliness, a whole village battered to ruins, skeletons of

roofs, shattered gables, gardens torn up by shells," yet only one of many similar scenes they were destined to witness before they had spent many weeks in that country. Beyond the village the route wandered through a maze of disused trenches, "Jack Johnson" holes, telephone wires, and knee-deep mud, difficult to follow and desperately uncomfortable owing to the "star-shells" and the fusillades of bullets that immediately followed their rising. Those night fatigues have always been more cordially detested than the first-line trenches.

In due course J. K. was introduced to the first-line too. "The journey to the trench is much as usual, though the latter part is muddier and more slippery, and the rifle-shots closer still. Under the shelter of hedges, past one or two battered houses, then the faint glow of a brazier close at hand, and we are there, bent down under the shelter of the sand-

bags, relieved that the danger-zone is past and the doom not yet fallen. . . . I am posted as sentry on the extreme right, with close instructions from the sergeant as to where to look. By degrees I summon up courage to look over the parapet, fully five feet high. It is a dark, gloomy night, only darker after the frequent rockets have fallen. Away there, pitch-black against the dark skyline, the tops of the German trenches are showing. I have to watch the ground out to the right front, a rapid, close scrutiny, whenever the light goes up. A nervy business at first when you know you are in the open and being shot at. But in time you know what the chances are, and how to take them, and by the time our forty-eight hours of duty are over I find a certain sporting fascination in exposing a full head and shoulders for two seconds during the glare, withdrawing sharply and hearing the

bullets whiz. You must not do it twice in the same place though, or if you risk it twice, not a third time. After the hour, relief, and two hours about the brazier, an old pail with punched out holes in its sides and bottom. There, half-awake, half-asleep, half-warm, half-cold, the hours pass to the next watch, and so the night passes till the dawn appears. The dawn—and everywhere desolation, and ah! the nameless horror of it, nowhere in a cultivated country, nowhere except in our own little corner, is there a human being to be seen; nowhere the smoke of a living chimney among the skeleton dead houses."

During their second afternoon in the trenches, as if to impress upon the novitiates the full significance of their position, the German batteries subjected them to a terrific cannonade. The bravest crouched down under that storm of shot and shell, and to the un-

initiated it was a fearsome and nerve-racking ordeal. But darkness brought relief and the homeward march. "And what a march! Five miles are little enough; even to strong men heavily loaded they are not much; but to us they contain tortures unspeakable. After four days wherein we have lived with bodies pinched up, and not moving more than a few yards each day, and eating and over-eating everlastingly, one would be more than human to march five miles and not feel fatigue. At any rate we reach billets late at night and utterly dead-beat."

Sunday came, and a Parade Service was held. "We sing," says J. K., "the 23rd and the 100th Psalms and listen to prayers, and all the time the cannon are booming, and ever and anon the distant crash of a 'Jack Johnson,' an impressive setting for the service. The men are drawn up in a hollow square with the

Chaplain in the centre; behind, the windmill, above, the wooded hill, all around the low-roofed huts and the belated fields and the desolation of war. The service is more of a service than usual, due partly perhaps to the preacher, but still more to the men in their surroundings, for the shadow of death has been over all, and perhaps in spite of themselves they are open to the religious emotion."

In a few days "D" Company set out once more for the trenches. It was a particularly dangerous part of the line, with the German trenches less than a hundred yards distant; and the night and day which followed proved very trying. In the early morning the Company suffered its first casualty, Lance-Corporal Scott, an Edinburgh graduate and Divinity student, being shot through the head. Profound gloom settled on the trench, but J. K., though heavy at heart, refused to become dis-

pirited, and put new life into his companions by his wonderful cheerfulness. It was indeed on such occasions that his dauntless Christian courage was most truly appreciated. When night fell, they set out for the Reserve-quarters, carrying their fallen comrade, whom they would not leave behind. They had no easy task in the darkness through the bullet-swept and shell-rent area, but they succeeded without a casualty, though it did seem incredible folly to risk the lives of twenty men in order to bury their friend two miles from the firing-line. For his conspicuous work during these twenty-four hours Forbes was rewarded by being promoted Lance-Corporal.

For several weeks now the same routine of work and rest was continued, a routine which became somewhat monotonous in spite of occasional alarms. As he puts it himself, "the days are much alike when at the huts, and no

less monotonous when we live the trench-life, and there may be little of note to chronicle even in the elusive wanderings of the soul". But these weeks revealed at least two things to Forbes which deserve some notice. The first thing was the great need for skilled snipers in his own and other battalions. The fact is that in those days the actual trench warfare was a very one-sided affair in that region, and the crack shots of the German riflemen had it all their own way. From many concealed points of vantage the German sniper fired into our lines and enfiladed our trenches without much fear of retaliation from our men, for woe to the man who ventured to look over the parapet in search of the ever-persistent Hun. There was something uncanny in the merciless and ceaseless watch the enemy seemed to keep. A British sentry would, out of curiosity, expose his head for a second to

glance along the enemy's lines; and a second later death from a sniper's bullet had claimed the unsuspecting victim. Forbes saw that the only way to stop this was to have British snipers equally well hidden and equally well trained, and to this problem he quietly gave his mind. Experience was sowing seed which should bear fruit later on.

The second thing revealed to him was his own extraordinary reliability as a guide especially at night. He had been detailed on one occasion to guide the Company Officer to a certain trench, and this he accomplished so well and so rapidly that the Officer retained him as his orderly. This was work for which much of his earlier training had amply fitted him. He himself was very enthusiastic about it. "We British," he says, "take risks which the Germans do not. We dispense with communication trenches in practice, though not

in theory. We prefer to walk over open ground exposed to bullets and that for hundreds of yards, rather than suffer the certain discomfort of the narrow muddy communication trenches where one must have knee-boots, or have mud and muddy water soak through puttees and socks to the very toes. That is my work—to escort the Company Officer and guide him through the open, for he has not eyes adapted to night work. It is by no means unpleasant work, though no little strain on a dark night." From this time onward, even when his own company was in rest-billets, J. K. was always in demand for guiding parties to and from the trenches, and in consequence spent very little of his time indoors. One very dark night he was instrumental in finding half a company which had got utterly lost on its way to the trenches. This company should have relieved "D" Company, but, as it

had never arrived, J. K. was commissioned "to shepherd the lost sheep to their folds," as he puts it himself. And on many other nights he was the means of rescuing parties and stragglers who had lost their bearings.

During these weeks the University Company lost some splendid men. Forbes describes himself as "stunned" by the death of one of the sergeants, probably the most popular man in the company, with whom he had been talking just a few minutes before. "A terrible blow!" he writes, "the awful problems open once more upon me, the awful unanswerable problems, that clamour for an answer and yet that cannot be answered, though the insistent spirit often demands that they must be answered or the spirit be lost evermore. And ever the old answer, that there can be no solution, that here we must wait and be patient, that here we must trust and hope and have

faith, faith in the All-good, that He who is, is and must be the All-good: and then must we rest, and then, strange though it seems, we are content to rest, or rather we feel that then alone we can safely rest, rest in the knowledge that we are moving in the spirit of truth, towards the Sun of Truth and Love." The death of Private John F. Knowles, the first of the Aberdeen United Free Church College volunteers and a member of the same "year" as Forbes, was another great grief to him. His diary shows little but the bare facts, yet from his conduct at the time it was evident that he felt the loss very keenly. It was indeed a relief for the members of "U" Company when the battalion returned for a well-earned rest, and, even though the rest was short owing to an early move to a different part of the line, they were far from sorry to have left the Kemmel district with its grim memories.

Their new position was at Hill 60, a name that for months before and months after has spelt Golgotha with blood-red letters. They reached their destination early one evening and proceeded to make themselves as comfortable as possible in the dug-outs which honeycomb the railway embankment. J. K. was unfortunate enough to be one of the forty or fifty men for whom there were no dug-outs or at least no serviceable ones. But they were too tired after their march to trouble much where they slept that night. Any hollow or corner sufficed, and even the cold rain in the early morning failed to awaken the weary host. Daylight, however, found the weather still worse, and digging-fatigues were perforce the order of the day. The scene from the embankment was in many ways strange and terrible. J. K.'s own description is good: "A small loch and a small stream flowing there-

from, with willows and alders rich about it, birches, limes, elms and oaks around the green meadows; a scene of perfect spring-time peace —ay! too peaceful, for neither man nor beast is working in these rich meadows: but war, and anon a shriek following hard on a dull explosion, and a puff of bluish smoke a few hundred yards away, where the enemy is persistently bursting shrapnel: or there to the westward, just where the sun is sinking, mark the church spires and church towers pointing heavenward—emblem of God-ward striving: and yet look to the smoke rising among them. As the darkness falls, you may see the glare and glow afar, for the remains of the ruined city are still ablaze—Ypres, one of the fairest cities in Belgium, fair in itself, fair in its surroundings, fair in its prosperity."

During one of the spells of trench-digging he conducted his first Burial-service. In his

diary he writes: "Now I am in the grave, laying the dead man gently to his last rest, spreading sand-bags over him: now out on the edge, and the officer asks me to say something. A broken prayer, short and miserably insufficient, and the earth scattered on the corpse, then the final Amen, and again the spade is in the hand and the grave filled in. Strange weird scene, the glory of the starry dome all around, the joy of the bursting spring in and through everything, and man's hatred and devilish instincts let loose to mar all."

He was the victim of much chaff about this time owing to an encounter with a real live German. Thus he relates it himself: "I saw my first real live German, saw him at a distance of thirty yards or thereby, and yet he fell neither to my person as prisoner nor to my rifle as prey. It happened on this wise. A thick mist at dawn and our trench at Stand-to

in the half-light. I stand on the fire-step, head and shoulders above the parapet, and peer into the doubtful shadows. Stretching beyond our barbed wire is a belt of seeding turnips, four or five feet high. Of a sudden something catches my attention there. A shadow seems to have moved, and I gaze at the shadow still more fixedly. Surely it is a man! No, a shadow for certain. Slight movement of the shadow again, and more fixed peering, yet the shapeless unknown will not be defined. Surely it was the wind, but I am just about to call a comrade's attention to the phenomenon when he stood up. I grabbed my rifle, and on the instant he turned to run, and others spotted him. Our fine new breech-covers were the ruin of us; at any rate when our patrol went out that night there was no trace of a dead German despite many shots fired." However he retrieved his reputation that night by crawl-

ing over the parapet and through the barbed wire into the debatable land, and tearing out thirty or forty yards of the turnips in front of the trench, so that a repetition of the spying operation was rendered impossible.

On the Sunday following its return from Hill 60 the battalion celebrated Holy Communion after the ordinary Church Parade. "Picture to yourself a table commandeered or saved from some Belgian kitchen and a white tablecloth thereon. (It is some time since most of us have seen a white tablecloth.) The bread passes round on a plain kitchen plate, and the wine in a silver goblet, some officer's souvenir no doubt, and also in a plain white enamelled cup. And that is all the material furniture except a basket-chair for the C.O. Otherwise there is nothing but the clear blue sky for roof, trees and leaves for walls, bare earth for floor, grass, plants and leaves for

carpet." The number of communicants was small, but the surroundings and the circumstances helped to make the simple service most impressive to those privileged to take part.

After a week's rest the battalion set out once more for the trenches, this time, as it proved, for a long spell and for duties such as were to try it as it had never been tried before, and bring forth the iron endurance and patient heroism of the members of this battalion, which by now was a trained and veteran unit. A six miles' heavy march took them to Ypres desolate beyond description. As they tramped through the city, the wanton destruction made their hearts burn with indignation and steeled them to the dangerous work ahead. Two miles east of Ypres, on the famous Menin road, they halted, and took up the position which they occupied for twenty-six eventful days. Forbes was now lance-sergeant, having been

promoted at one bound from lance-corporal to his new rank, and during these days he displayed still more effectively the qualities of skill and coolness which had won him his sergeant's stripes.

The situation on the Ypres-Menin road was far from enviable. A little earlier in the year, backed by a multitude of guns of heavy calibre and resorting to the use of asphyxiating gases, the Germans had penetrated our lines, and the tide of battle went ill with the British. The enemy rolled on in great numbers and took up their position on the west side of Hooge, where they were checked for the time by a handful of dismounted cavalry. Then the 8th Brigade, of which the 4th Gordons formed part, came into action again and set about preparing trenches and consolidating the position to keep back the Germans. The period of twenty-six days so spent was one of

continuous and intense bombardment from the enemy's artillery. To add to the discomfort, a hot sun glared down and scorched the troops by day with unrelenting rays, while by night the sweat poured from their brows as they went on with their digging, generally in full fighting kit, for none knew the moment that an attack might be made. Such a spell would demoralize the strongest of men, especially as rations were not over-sufficient always, and water was desperately scarce; but the troops were wonderful, and J. K. appears to have found it a time of uncommon exhilaration. One day a platoon which had been holding a detached portion of a trench was spotted and heavily shelled by the Germans. Of course the men had to lie where they were till night fell as there was no communication trench, and, when at last they did manage to crawl back to the main trench, they had lost half

their number. Next morning volunteers were called for to hold that section of the trench and Forbes was put in charge of them. He chose six of their number, and with these he crawled out to the battered trench, eager for the dangerous post, yet solicitous about his men, for he says: "One hardly likes to ask men to come, for one may be leading them to their death". This little incident is just one of many which show how his worth and efficiency had come to be recognized in the battalion.

The bombardment to which they were subjected had its comedy as well as its tragedy, and one humorous occurrence which he describes for us annoyed him more than all the terrors of shrapnel and "whizz-bangs". "Tea is almost ready," he writes, "and the mess-tin lid is going strong; ham just frizzling to the critical point beyond which it is no

more ham, but simply burnt pig. Already our mouths are beginning to water, when comes the warning whimper, crescendo more pronounced than usual, then the final savage swish earthwards, and a Vesuvius eruption almost at our very side. This time it is but three or four yards away, and probably only the fact that there is a railway line between us and the explosion has saved us. A Vesuvius eruption, then the overwhelming of Pompeii, and the two of us are flung bodily to the ground, though whether it is the draught of the explosion or the instinct of self-preservation is hard to say. It matters not: breakfast is ruined; this is *the* catastrophe!"

Besides taking his share in digging and other duties, J. K. at this time did much valuable work in scouting and reconnaissance. He often went out with a comrade in the early morning to watch any movement in the

enemy's lines and perchance get a shot at an unwary Hun. "Out again," he says, "bent on the work of death, out through the dripping grasses, till the enemy line is in clear view. Then to lie there, rifle in readiness, till an opportunity may show. Then for perhaps half an hour, lying, two of us, among the wet grass, until the lifting mists drive us cautiously in again. One shot fired, with what result we know not."

At length the position was ready for the attack which all had expected. The British, owing to excessive strain and arduous labour, were ready first, and the attack was planned for 16 June, 1915, the hundredth anniversary of the battle of Quatre Bras. The object of the attack was to capture the German lines in and beyond a strip of trees called Y wood, about half a mile long and two or three hundred yards deep, the idea being to link up the

trenches on the right—just west of Hooge—with the British position on the left, some distance north of the Menin road. Early in the morning our artillery opened, and for a full hour and a half rained shells of every calibre, transforming a fresh green wood into a few withered and scorched tree-trunks. While this was taking place, J. K. coolly began to "drum-up," saying, "We must have a good meal while yet there is time and opportunity". At the moment due the attack went over and was forthwith a great success. Success favoured us till the afternoon, when in desperate and repeated counter-attacks the Germans swarmed on our lines and would fain have thrust us back. It was at this point that part of the 4th Gordons, though originally meant for reserve, was called up as supporting reinforcements, and at this part of the day Forbes displayed the utmost coolness and alertness,

observing with his glasses the Germans' every movement and picking off the enemy as they showed themselves a target for his rifle. He escaped himself without a scratch, but lost one of his closest friends, one who had been with him since the Bedford days, of whom he writes, "I knew not until he was gone how close he had actually come to me".

On the night of the 18th day of June the battalion was once more relieved—weak in numbers and weak in strength, yet prepared to "carry on," retaining still the qualities that lead a regiment from strength to strength, from victory to victory.

VI

SNIPER-SERGEANT

VI

SNIPER-SERGEANT

THE remaining part of June and the most of July were spent in beneficial rest and training for further duty, and that period is the beginning of the last phase of Forbes's life. It was then that he became Sergeant of the Snipers, a section which he organized and trained to utterly confound the German crack shots.

If it be remembered what the battalion had suffered at the hands of enemy snipers in earlier months, it is not surprising that it was decided to form such a section if there could be found a man capable of training it. While he had been engaged in the usual trench warfare Forbes had been carefully preparing in

his mind the means he should adopt to retaliate on the German snipers if ever he got the chance, and so, when he was selected as the man to undertake the new post of Sniper-Sergeant, he had his plans cut and dry. All along he had done splendid work, but now there began an era of service acknowledged to be most valuable by the best authorities on the Staff. He picked his little band—16 N.C.O.'s and men—showing in his choice much foresight and acquaintance with men's character, and immediately set about training them. Starting right at the first principles of ordinary observation, he gave very efficient lessons and practice in description and recognition of targets, scouting and visual training, and always paid special attention to developing the powers of observation and memory. As time went on, studying the landscape for the purpose of finding suitable sniping spots formed

part of his scheme, and at this point many days were spent on bullet-proof sniping-posts which by means of careful construction and masking were absolutely invisible to the enemy. Judging distances with great accuracy, and practice in approaching enemy positions over comparatively open ground, involving snake-like crawling, then gave place to more advanced scouting work, which in turn was replaced by ordinary sketching of positions, and finally panorama-sketching, at both of which J. K. was an adept. He revelled in his work. "It seems," he says, "I have the eye for a good loophole position, besides the knack of sandbagging it in, and the faculty of masking the same, and years of experience in the use of field-glasses and telescopes. So I have the congenial task of training the dozen or so best shots and most daring men in the battalion in these things, so that the utmost may be made

of their shooting and the devil that is in them." And again in one of his letters he writes: "Quite a number of half-forgotten and much neglected faculties of mine seem to be coming all into use again, all those years of working with maps and wandering in Scottish wildernesses, and the faculty of looking into things through a pair of glasses, and the faculty of being able to use all these quite decently when a big strain is on your nerves, when you must either raise your head into danger or the information be lost." He prosecuted his plan of training with the utmost vigour and determination. Each day's work was carefully mapped out the evening before, and when day came every detail was carried through. He insisted upon this rigorous course of instruction because he knew that it was necessary, and he knew that his men recognized the necessity as much as he did himself. They worked hard

and encountered dangers cheerfully. They were one and all men who possessed the qualities which their leader considered essential in a sniper—grit, devil, and mother-wit. It is not surprising that after five weeks of such training the "Snipers' Section," now a recognized and respected band commanded by one to whom the whole battalion looked up, was prepared to go forth and deal with the German riflemen.

At this point it may not be inappropriate to sketch the character of Forbes as it impressed itself upon his snipers at the time, especially as we are indebted for the description to one who was destined later to succeed Forbes as Sniper-Sergeant, and like him to lay down his life a sacrifice for his friends — Sergeant Robert Donald. "Vigour of mind was backed by his iron body, and both seemed capable of enduring endless tasks and arduous fatigues. He

walked very erect, with a light swinging step, head in the air, shoulders thrown back, and this gait never altered even in the presence of extreme danger. These outward signs only emphasized the ever decided condition of his enormous mind. Vigour and decision were marked in his every action, paralleled with a mind that could turn in whatsoever direction called for note, and grasp the situation at a glance and come to a definite decision at once while other minds would be still wrestling with the problem. This does not imply that his judgment was too quickly arrived at or too readily pronounced. No man was more careful in judging or more reluctant to express his opinion unless definitely pressed. There were, it is true, exceptions to this. It was a sight to see his nobler feelings irritated by anything mean or despicable, especially anything of a cowardly nature, or that is unworthy of a man.

His eagle eye would reflect the pent-up feelings within and sometimes would the sublime indignation give itself vent in a few words—simple indeed but full of significance—words of a gentleman, yet woe befall the man on whom the scathing censure would fall. But generally his eyes were generous and kindly, and a smile from J. K. meant for many an inspiration.

"J. K.'s punctuality and careful attention to disciplinary orders were most strict. Regimental routine laid it down that Réveillé should be at 6.30 a.m., Lights Out at 9.15 p.m. About 6.15 in the morning a figure would emerge from the bivouac and industriously perform the usual morning toilet. Immediately afterwards a rifle that was always in the cleanest condition was being sedulously cleaned. After these operations J. K. would waken the sleeping figures of his section and then, having

tidily arranged his kit and cleaned his little compartment in the 'bivy,' would search out his Greek Testament or Bible and settle down to study for almost an hour. Then according to orders he would fall in for physical drill and perform the same with the usual vigour as if intent to derive full benefit from it. 8 a.m.—breakfast, then the day's duties. . . . J. K. spent his evenings in a very different way from the average soldier. Tea being finished, he would prepare the next day's plan of action or write out the theory of the training actually practised that day and the lessons derived from it. This being done, he would draw from his pack or knapsack the book that was dearest to him—the Book of books—and the hours of the evening were passed in thoughtful meditation and serenity. But, though he was an attentive and devoted student, he was no book-worm. From time to time during a leisure

hour in the afternoon he would peruse such newspapers or magazines as were to hand, and then again the military manuals—especially the latest editions of such books as dealt with the theory of the rifle and map-reading and field-sketching—were consulted and digested. He usually wrote his letters early in the morning before parade, while the camp was still in the midst of its slumbers, as if it were meet that in quiet and tranquillity the thoughts should be penned that came from his contented mind."

After a very genial five weeks spent in camp, the battalion late in July went into action at Hooge, the first time at that place of gloomy and evil associations. It was and is still one of the hottest spots on the British front. The "No Man's Land" between the lines is a place of blasted desolation, scorched and furrowed and blighted by all the most hideous things that war can bring forth. There is no

living thing there. The dead that have been buried by shells have been thrown up and buried again. All the most fiendish devices that "Kultur" could invent were first practised at that spot: first asphyxiating gas, next aerial torpedoes, then liquid fire. There have been thousands slain on the few desolate acres that lie to the south of what was once a village, and in Sanctuary Wood, a wood that surely belies its name.

However, things seemed comparatively quiet when the battalion went into the trenches, and now for the first time did the snipers of that unit have some opportunity for revenge. Immediately the efforts expended by J. K. in a thorough training began to tell. The German snipers were as active as ever, and sniped, sniped, sniped incessantly from their hidden loopholes at our parapets. But after two days scarcely a shot came from the

German lines. By careful observation with the telescope the battalion's snipers located the positions of the enemy sharpshooters and put them to silence, occasionally adding a name or two to the German casualty lists. The work involved a fair amount of risk, required nerve and great care, but it succeeded. The Germans were harassed by an unrelenting fire directed from invisible riflemen, and they were face to face with superior marksmen and more terrible foemen than they had yet encountered.

Meantime J. K. was putting his plans to the test, and in broad daylight with sometimes very little cover would crawl out in front of our lines to a point of vantage, and searching with his keen eye the trees and bushes behind the German lines would snipe the enemy as they moved about behind their covering screen. At another time he would be carefully trying to locate the enemy's trench-mortars that

played havoc with our trenches. He was perfectly in his element, and each evening returned with a gleam of satisfaction in his eye that flashed success.

Two points of our lines came in for a special share of his attention during that first spell in the Hooge trenches. One was a saphead leading out from our front line, and along this he used to crawl as it brought him very close to the enemy. On more than one occasion he went beyond even the sap and crawled into the brushwood at considerable risk to himself. But he seemed to know when the risk was worth while, and had a knack of knowing where the greatest possibilities were. At least two Germans fell to his rifle from this sap during the four days which comprised the first visit to those trenches. The second place which he favoured was a particularly dangerous locality at the junction of a communication

trench and the support line near Hooge village, about a hundred yards from the brick wall of the château. The château had long before disappeared save for the wall, itself partly demolished, and a few gaunt ruins of the building. On the second day in the trenches there a huge mine was exploded to blow up the wall and an area infested by Germans, while the 4th Middlesex Regiment, supported by the 1st Gordon Highlanders, charged, took, and consolidated 150 yards of enemy lines to strengthen our position. In this fight Forbes had the satisfaction of seeing his section do good work, but his joy was clouded by the death of one of his closest friends, Sergeant Allardyce, who led the bombers in the attack on the German trenches. This loss was a severe blow to him, and, as a brother sergeant said, "it increased tenfold his account with the enemy"

Both before and especially after this small battle the spot referred to above was "crumped" incessantly, yet time after time J. K. went there to observe. The place commanded the German lines in the hollow in Sanctuary Wood, and a maze of trenches leading back to a strong redoubt. He used to get over the parapet and lie in the open while he took in every detail of the German lines. While he was thus occupied, huge ear-splitting shells would burst around making the place intolerable, yet he would lie unmoved till he had seen all that he desired. On one occasion, after a few shells had landed quite near, he looked up with an annoyed expression, and at that moment a grinding eight incher burst within six yards of him. He reluctantly crawled back into the trench and moved away to a safer locality. "It was time to shift," he remarked modestly afterwards.

On returning to camp J. K. was nominated for leave principally on account of his splendid work. Leave had just started in the battalion then, and the prospect of it was enough to put any man aglow with excitement; but, though undoubtedly pleased that his furlough had come, J. K. showed not the slightest trace of emotion. Indeed, with a twinkle in his eye, he declared that this unexpected turn of events would interfere with his work, especially at a time when the section was beginning to go strong!

At that time men returning from the short five days' leave came back in a somewhat downhearted condition, looking rather pale and tired. The whole process was a rush from beginning to end. There was so much to do, so many friends had to be seen in the short time, and a long tiresome journey back to the battle-field completed the misery of the

moment. Not so with J. K. He returned as sunburnt and cheerful as ever. This was commented on by the men of his own section who hailed his return with acclamation. After removing his equipment and pack he proceeded to speak about his time at home. He admitted that the time was short, especially as he could not go abroad without being held up by many friends and acquaintances. He described too how glad was the welcome he received when he went home. Even his kilt-apron had been rendered unserviceable for the time being by being washed at the instigation of his "mither"! Yet, as he spoke, a gentle look came into his eyes as at all times when speaking of home, for it was good to see the dutiful and loving affection he had for home and parents.

Each time the battalion was back in camp the snipers continued to receive careful training

at the hands of their sergeant. He gave, naturally, special attention to shooting, but also gave attention to other faculties to be developed in the sniper. At first only a very moderate shot himself, he became by dint of practice and perseverance very expert with the rifle. The other training resolved itself into scouting and crawling about to enemy positions. "Crawl" was one of the words he used unceasingly, and he himself in close proximity to the enemy would crawl dexterously and unseen up to their very presence.

The next trenches the 4th Gordons took over were those near St. Eloi on either side of the Ypres-Comines Canal. Here again the German snipers were confounded in a few days. They were very active and persistent for a time, but as their loopholes got blocked and bespattered with British bullets—and occasionally battered by J. K.'s sporting rifle which fired

an enormous bullet—and as their comrades got picked off with the same deadly missiles, and their working parties shelled as the result of careful observation, they realized that they were outmatched, and desisted from their efforts. Again J. K. was brilliant; indeed, so much was he relied upon at this time that he had to furnish a daily report which was sent to Divisional Headquarters. From an eminence —the historic "Bluff," a commanding position for effective observation, used by the 4th Gordon snipers then, and afterwards at a later date, from December, 1915, to February, 1916, as a pet sniping position, but since the latter date levelled by mines and shell-fire—J. K. would gaze for hours on the enemy defences and gain the valuable information which he submitted from day to day. On the south side of the canal he would crawl out on to the bank and snipe the enemy down the canal-bed.

At a point about two hundred yards from our front line a small wooden bridge crossed the canal, linking up the German trenches on either side. Ten yards beyond this J. K. discovered another bridge artfully concealed behind the first and consisting of a green covering of turf over a wooden framework. It was very cleverly constructed, and footmarks leading down on both sides showed that this second bridge was the one most commonly used at night, but so skilfully was it hidden behind the first—the colour of the turf being exactly the colour of the surroundings—that it had not been previously discovered. The night after the discovery, however, J. K. had a fixed rifle battery trained on the spot to catch the enemy as they passed over the bridge by night, and true enough this new weapon caused some consternation. The first round fired elicited a flare light from the German lines, and at the

next few rounds there came about half a dozen. Whether casualties were caused or not, the Hun was obviously very wrathful and appeared to suspect that some enemy sniper had crawled out in the darkness and was sweeping with an accurate fire the connecting link between their trenches.

From time to time J. K. would wander about on the top of the Bluff amongst what trees and bushes still remained, watching the movements of the enemy. On several occasions they poured high explosive shrapnel at him, probably thinking that this was some Staff officer surveying the battle-field. But the crashing shells had not the slightest effect on this man who, with head erect as usual and shoulders square, laughed in the face of danger. In fact he seemed to treat them as if he were doing his country a service by drawing the enemy's fire upon himself. This fearlessness which at

times amounted to a reckless temerity as far as he himself was concerned was ever present, yet as regards others he was most careful. All his schemes for harassing the enemy were laid with the utmost care and foresight so that they might not be discovered, and in every instance the enemy were baffled in trying to discover the source of the irritation.

Before the battalion left this position an attack was made by the British at Hooge to recover some trenches that had been lost owing to the Germans using liquid fire, and to distract the attention of the enemy a savage bombardment was delivered by the guns facing the trenches opposite the battalion's front. The bombardment lasted from 2.45 to 3.15 a.m. while the morning was still dark. J. K. had his plans ready the night before. An hour before the guns began, his snipers were posted all over the place to snipe steadily at

whatever points the enemy might pass, if troops were moved up to resist what they might deem to be an attack on this part of the front. He himself occupied an advanced eminence on the Bluff, and remained there until everything had quietened down and there was no further opportunity of catching the Boche on the hop.

He liked that position so well that he was very loath to leave it when the battalion was relieved. On the point of the Bluff itself he built with his own hands one or two loopholes from which to snipe the enemy. One night while waiting the arrival of two of his men to help with the work, he climbed the mound and started work on his own account all alone. He therefore told a sentry who was some distance away to give a look round occasionally to see if things were all well, for bullets whizzed perpetually by night all round the brow of the Bluff. By the time his companions had arrived

J. K. was standing behind the finished work adding the final touches to it, this being only one instance of his capacity for work no matter of what description.

And all the while he yet found time for meditation and study. The nightly report of the day's intelligence had to be made out, after which he would retire for a few hours' deserved rest, but not before having a look at the favourite books which were always to be found in a little improvised shelf above the stretcher which at that time happened to be his sleeping place. He was always up before dawn, that is, if he rested at all, for often he was active all night, and when he did turn in to sleep it was always after the thick darkness had settled, for on no account would he lose a moment of valuable daylight. Only during the heat of the day when all was quiet in the enemy's lines would he sometimes snatch a few hours' sleep

in the daytime. Then again he would make the usual entries in his diary which, if preserved, would have furnished a wonderful insight into the character and soul of the man. One of his companions remembers seeing a reflection which he entered at this time. It ran thus: "I have blood on my hands, and all because they are doing the same as we". He was commenting doubtless on the victims of his shooting, and his magnanimous heart clearly saw that all Germans were not monsters of iniquity, and that many, though fighting for their country's sake, were not at heart anxious for war or responsible for its outbreak. A little further down the page he wrote: "But the German is a cunning foe," and proceeded to tell the story of the concealed bridge in words that indicated that after all he relished the struggle with a worthy antagonist.

But he had to bid farewell to the Bluff, much

though he regretted doing so. In camp, however, he was by no means idle. His services as scout and his intelligence reports had become indispensable at Head-quarters, so that scarcely a day passed without his having to go to some part of the line to gather information, often at great personal risk. By way of contrast with this life of adventure he tells in one of his letters of how he officiated as an Elder at a Communion Service. "It felt a bit strange," he says, "to stand by the table there in a patched and frayed tunic and kilt, tattered hosetops and equipment, and loaded up with full ammunition and all the implements of the trade but the rifle. Certainly it felt a bit strange to hand round the bread when armed to the teeth." That was the gallant sergeant's last Communion Service.

The following extract from a letter written by his Commanding Officer shows how his

work was appreciated. "Sergeant Forbes is an invaluable man, as the amount of information he gets by creeping about is most wonderful. He is greatly assisting to keep up the grand name of the battalion by his work. He loves nothing better than to creep up by day to within ten yards of the German trenches and see what's doing. Needless to say he does not often return without something in his bag." And in a letter sent to Forbes himself the General commanding the Division wrote in these terms: "Your Commanding Officer and Brigade Commander have informed me that you distinguished yourself by your conduct in the field. I have read their report with pleasure and have brought it to the notice of Higher Authority."

Beyond these letters he received no recognition for his splendid services as Sergeant of the Snipers.

VII

ROLL-CALL

VII

ROLL-CALL

WHEN next the battalion went into action it took over the trenches once more in Sanctuary Wood, and this henceforth was the ground it held until a fortnight after 25 September. It was a very different place from what it had been at the time of the battalion's first visit to that spot. Instead of a thick green wood it was now a pitiable heap of wreckage and desolation. Such splintered trees as remained were not sufficient even to give cover from view, and the whole wood, at the extreme point of the big Ypres salient, was suggestive of wildest tragedy and deepest treachery. One moment perfect silence reigned, next moment

the heavens were rent and the earth was torn by the bursting of monster shells.

During August and September J. K. was indefatigable in his efforts to gain information regarding the enemy's trenches, strength, defences, guns, and all the other details necessary to the planning of an attack. Ever devoted to duty he seemed to excel, if that were possible, all his previous industry and success. The Commanding Officer found it needful to have him stay beside him in the trenches, for the valuable suggestions and important information he submitted. It was no uncommon sight to see J. K. intercepted by the Brigadier-General, and the two would converse seriously about the strategy of the position. On one occasion the Divisional General himself talked with him on subjects of military importance. His daily reports on the enemy positions were handed on, untampered with, straight to Divi-

sional Head-quarters, and no one who took part in the operations on the fateful 25th can have any doubt but that much of the success which attended the 4th Gordons in the charge was due to the fine Intelligence work done by Sergeant Forbes, assisted by his loyal band of snipers who owed practically all their skill to his careful tuition. With his well-known haversack slung over one shoulder, his water-bottle over the other, and the big sporting-rifle under his arm, he was a familiar figure all over the brigade front, and both officers and men were always ready and willing to give him any assistance he might require in the course of his adventurous expeditions.

The story of how J. K. looted a German sniping-post was one that appealed to the sporting instincts of the whole battalion, and served to enhance his reputation. The post was discovered by him while scouting along a

trench which had previously been held by British troops but had been abandoned as being too hot to hold owing to enfilade shell-fire. Accompanied by an orderly he was crawling round the corner of a traverse when he suddenly halted, and turning round motioned to his companion to stop. Directly facing him and only about six yards away was a semicircular parapet with a German loophole looking straight in his direction. He hesitated just a moment and then telling his friend to cover the loophole with his rifle he crawled coolly up to the post and peeped round the side to see whether it was occupied or not. Fortunately the place was empty at that time, and the couple made a minute inspection of the sniping-post. The thought of destroying the parapet and loopholes at once entered both their minds, but after some deliberation it was decided to leave the post

intact and to occupy it with several bombers and snipers early in the evening before the Huns would be likely to arrive. Returning to Battalion Head-quarters, J. K. announced his discovery to the C.O., and his suggestion for the discomfiture of the enemy was sanctioned at once. By dusk the post was occupied by the sergeant and his men and everything was in readiness for the reception of the Boches. But somehow or other the enemy had discovered that there was something suspicious about their post that night, and the first warning given of their approach was a bomb which fell short and burst without doing any damage. Our men replied with a fusillade of bombs, and the party of Germans scattered and ran. The occupants continued their vigil all night, but nothing further happened, the enemy having evidently concluded that the post was held in strong force. Before daylight the place was

dismantled and the loopholes were carried back to Battalion Head-quarters as "souvenirs" of one among many of J. K.'s adventures.

When the battalion was relieved for a few days' rest before going up for the charge on 25 September, J. K. volunteered to stay in the trenches along with six of his snipers to keep an eye on the opposing lines and see that Head-quarters got an accurate report each day of any change in their defences. During those few days the Germans, who had an inkling that an attack was imminent, shelled this part of the line unceasingly, but despite the intensity of their fire J. K. never failed to watch the enemy lines and note any alterations made from day to day. He had many narrow escapes and risked his life time and again in his endeavour to make his reports as complete and accurate as possible in view of the great events that were close at hand.

At last the day of the attack dawned, and, though every one was excited and somewhat nervous, J. K. presented the usual cool and impassive demeanour. During the short but intense bombardment which preceded the mounting of the parapet he stood in the front trench with two of his section and waited until it was time for them to take part in the operations. His duty was to follow after the charging companies and on arriving in the German trenches to superintend the shifting of the loopholes and the throwing up of sniping-posts to harass the enemy. By the time he left our trenches the artillery of both sides was in full blast and it seemed as if nothing could live in the small piece of open ground separating the lines. The trio reached the German first line unscathed, and J. K. proceeded to carry out his plans. He sent his two companions back to the British lines with a

message, and pressed on accompanied by a large party that had gathered round him. Under his leadership they got over the German third line and rushed for the fourth. There he marked a machine-gun making havoc amongst the kilted ranks, and, though by this time bleeding from a wound in the leg, he charged the German gunners, put the three of them out of action, and captured the gun. Then, turning back to find a guard for the gun and have his wound dressed, J. K. was struck by a shell which exploded, killing him instantaneously. Thus perished nobly a man who, among his contemporaries, stood in a class by himself. In the whole British Army it would be difficult to find another in whom such extraordinary powers of mind and body were allied with such nobility of soul. Generous, large-hearted, contented, he combined the qualities of the disciplined and ideal soldier

with those of the thorough Christian gentleman. No decoration of honour has been added to his name. None that might be added could enrich the memory of one who gave himself to the uttermost for the country which he loved and the Master whom he reverently followed.

. . . . . .

It would be impossible in this brief Memoir to do more than refer in passing to the hundreds of expressions of sympathy and appreciation received by Forbes's parents and the other members of the family.

His Commanding Officer in the course of a letter writes : "I cannot tell you how grieved I am personally, or what sorrow is felt not only in the battalion but in others, when we received news that your son was dead. Our Brigadier and our Divisional General have both expressed to me their sorrow, as his work

was well known to both of them. . . . To him we were indebted for most painstaking and successful reconnaissance of the enemy's position prior to the attack. In his capacity as Sergeant of the Snipers he did splendid work, in searching for and quietening those of the enemy, mostly at great personal risk. I had instructed him on the day of the attack to act as my chief source of intelligence, and he had followed up the attack for this purpose. . . . I cannot estimate his loss to us." Another officer writes: "Your son was without doubt the finest man in the battalion, and he was loved by all who came near him". His Divisional General spoke of him as "that gallant soldier, Sergeant Forbes," while his Chaplain in a glowing tribute declares, "I never met a braver man, nor a more sweet and lovable character".

The Professors of the Aberdeen United

Free Church College paid many a fine public testimony to his greatness as a soldier, a scholar, and a man. Professor J. A. Selbie wrote: "The death of Sergeant John Keith Forbes, M.A., has cast a gloom over the United Free Church College of Aberdeen, of which he was so bright an ornament. Seldom, if ever, has that College had the privilege of enrolling a student of greater promise. In every department of study he excelled, more especially in Hebrew, where, it is safe to say, no limit could have been set to his advancement. . . . It was no small sacrifice he made when he abandoned work so congenial to him to take up arms in defence of his country, but he felt it to be the line of duty, and he was one of the first in our College to take this step. . . . Abundant testimony has been borne as to the high moral influence he exerted on his comrades, and to the esteem in which he was

held by all ranks in the company to which he belonged. It is right to add that his modesty was as notable as his intellectual gifts and his scholarship, while no one who knew him could doubt the depth and sincerity of his religious convictions. John Forbes—to give him the designation by which he was best known to us—will long be remembered as a most lovable man, a true friend, and a singularly pure and gifted soul. While his life was comparatively short, it was an exceptionally full one, and a fitting preparation for the higher service of his Lord, on which he has now entered."

It may perhaps be well to add here Professor Selbie's appreciation of J. K.'s notes on Job, a work unfortunately incomplete, but of which the greater part was written during the period of Active Service: "The notes reveal, as we should have expected, the most exact and accomplished scholarship, and an acquaintance

with the leading authorities, particularly Budde's latest commentary, which must have been his companion to the last. It is marvellous how nothing of importance has been overlooked. All questions of Introduction are carefully discussed, critical questions of Text, the evidence of the Versions, etc., receive due attention; a careful translation is given; and the critical notes, though necessarily brief, exhibit a thoroughly sound judgment. Had Mr. Forbes been spared, I am convinced that he could have expanded and completed his notes in such a way as to produce a Commentary on Job which could have challenged comparison even with the best work that has been done in that field."

Professor D. S. Cairns writes of him in the "United Free Church Record": "Professor Selbie has borne testimony already to the exceptional distinction of his work in Hebrew.

. . . I can bear similar witness to his work in Theology. Conspicuous in that work was a very remarkable thesis on 'The Nature of Religion,' in which he seemed to be pouring out the result of long inward conflict. I had never any doubt from the time of reading that essay that Forbes had it in him to go far in the domain of religious thought, the originality and grasp and style being as remarkable as the conviction. So very individual a character, which abhorred all conventions, might easily have become isolated from others, but few things about Forbes are more creditable than the genuine affection and admiration which, all along, his fellow-students had for him. There are no men more generous though none more critical than students, and all the numerous personal testimonies, which have appeared since his death in private letters and public journals, have in them this peculiar note. I

have by me as I write a characteristic letter from a fellow-student who knew him well, in which he writes: 'I know that I say truth when I say that there isn't one of the College men who wouldn't gladly have died instead of John Forbes. He of all of us ought to have lived.' . . . Like others among his fellow-students I believe that in time he could have got a Commission, but he wanted to be alongside of men in the ranks and even at first tried to avoid being put among his friends in the more congenial University Company. . . . From the front he sent home many letters. I possess some which are extraordinarily graphic and moving, revealing the heart of a real evangelist and lover of men who had ever deep in his soul the wish to make Christ real to his fellow-soldiers, but at the same time the most vivid perception of the actual realities of war and a certain joy in battle and adventure

as well. There is in his letters not the smallest trace of bitterness towards the enemy. He did not fight in hate but from a clear recognition of personal duty in service. . . ."

At a meeting of the Aberdeen United Free Presbytery, Professor Cairns said: "Forbes was certainly one of the most remarkable students that I have ever known, and if God had spared him, he would have gone very far in the service of the Church. But the finest thing about him was his character. . . . He was indeed a noble and generous man, who exerted a deep influence for good wherever he came."

The many Pulpit references, and tributes from the Lord Provost and various public bodies in Aberdeen and the North of Scotland, all testified to his unique personality, his fine manly Christian character, and the deep sense of loss felt by the whole community at

his death. Rathven, where he had spent so many happy and useful years of his life, did not forget its tribute to the dead hero. An intimate friend of his there wrote: "Little do we know the greatness of those who live close to us day by day. Cloaked by certain eccentricities, the greatness and sterling worth of J. K. Forbes were hidden from many people. Everything he set his mind to he did well. Was it Music? His knowledge was greater than that of most professional musicians! Was it Philosophy? He devoured the philosophies but wrote his own! Was it Games—did he not strive to the utmost in any sphere? . . . Alas that war should deprive us of such worth! But righteousness called him; the frightful deeds of the Germans in Belgium burned into his soul, and he could not be held back—he must avenge the wrongs done in the Netherlands by taking a strong part. Entering as a

private, when he might have got his Commission at any time, he became the best and most trustworthy sergeant of the battalion—the sergeant by whom the young lads swore, the one on whom they could depend to give them their due chance without undue exposure to German bullets. Truly their hearts are sore to-day, and yet they cannot help being somewhat comforted that the great warrior heart of J. K. should have stopped its beating only after the accomplishment of one of the great and glorious deeds of this world war."

Perhaps one of the finest tributes comes from the pen of " J. M. R. " in the " Aberdeen Free Press". After a brief biography he writes: " Last scene of all—somewhere in France. J. K. in the role of the Fighting Parson, strenuously digging himself and his men into their trenches, anon, in the darkness of night, creeping up to the enemy's trenches to

pick up information, like some Red Indian of his boyhood's stories, and then in his off-duty hours, grinding, with the ardour of Browning's Grammarian, at Hebrew! J. K. in his time played many parts—teacher and wanderer, musician and theologian; but the last crowned all—the part of the patriot. . . . And now all that throbbing life-force is still. Another bright flame is quenched. The many musical instruments are silent; the tent, companion of his tours, is folded; the Hebrew oracles are dumb. But elsewhere, we may believe, 'in the sounding labour-house vast of Being' his activity has not ceased. We may think of him now practising with harp and psaltery; we may image him now pitching his tabernacle in other Highlands, and, his initiation in the Hebrew oracles completed, essaying now the very Mount of God."

One of the original University Company,

now an Officer in the Seaforths, gives delightful expression to the regard felt for J. K. by his most intimate friends. "I never understood men," he writes, "as I have done since war broke out. The real man, stript of all conventionalities, could be seen in France more than anywhere else. I never thought there was so much in every one—so much beauty if we had the power to see it. I shall ever look back with pleasure on life with the Gordons. The nearest approach to my ideal I met there—John Keith Forbes, a man who lost sight of himself in his Great Ideal. Whatever he thought to be his duty he did fearlessly and wisely, no matter what it cost him. He was in every sense of the word—A MAN!"

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